

George Gemistos Plethon

The Last of the Hellenes



C. M. WOODHOUSE

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is something of a legend among historians of the late Byzantine Empire and the early Italian Renaissance about George Gemistos, who called himself Plethon. The legend has still to be completely explored. There have been many monographs about different aspects of his life and works, and most of what he wrote has been published, though in scattered and often inaccessible editions. There has been no previous account in any language of his life and writings as a whole. He remains an interesting and mysterious figure in the last century of Byzantium. Whether he was an important figure, and if so in what way, has still to be explained.

Exploring the legend is a difficult task, simply because it is a legend. It rests chiefly, but not exclusively, on the impact he made by his presence in Florence in 1439, the lectures he gave there 'On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato' (or, more precisely, 'with regard to Plato'), and the long essay in which he summarized them, usually known as *De Differentiis*. It is a commonplace among scholars that the Italians who formed his audience were greatly impressed by his personality and his arguments. Sir Steven Runciman has written that 'in Italy, where the learned world had come to realize what a store of knowledge was to be found in Byzantium, the intellectuals longed to see this illustrious philosopher'.¹ François Masai wrote that 'Pléthon est entré en relation, non pas seulement avec des personnages secondaires, . . . mais avec les coryphées de l'humanisme italien . . .'.² Many other scholars have written to similar effect. They echo statements contained in the two surviving funeral orations on Gemistos.³

No doubt they are right, but the evidence of his influence is surprisingly slight. The number of Gemistos' identifiable acquaintances in Italy is small. Only one—Ciriaco Pizzicolti (in Greek Kyriakos, and in English Cyriac of Ancona), who was a keen antiquarian but not a philosopher—can be said with certainty to have known Gemistos before his visit to Italy. Only two—Cosimo de' Medici and Grigorio Tifernate—are known with certainty to have heard Gemistos' lectures at Florence. Cosimo de' Medici was of course the pre-eminent name:

¹ S. Runciman, *Mistra* (London 1980), 116.

² Masai (1956), 344. ³ PG 160, 807 C-D; 813 D.

if he went to hear Gemistos, then many of his circle would have gone also.

Further than this it is hard to go. Five other Italians are known by name who encountered Gemistos: Ugo Benzi at Ferrara; Francesco Filelfo at Bologna; Lionardo Bruni, Paolo Toscanelli, and Pietro Vitali (called 'Peter of Calabria') at Florence; but only the last three could have heard his lectures, and it is no more than a strong presumption that they did so. As for the text of *De Differentiis*, only one manuscript (the autograph) is known to have been available in Italy during his lifetime, and that was in the hands not of any of his Italian friends (though it was for them that he wrote it) but of his former pupil, Cardinal Bessarion. So far as the names of individuals go, the rest is all conjecture, though much of the conjecture is no doubt well based.

Gemistos' place in the intersecting worlds of Greek and Latin humanism, and thus in the western Renaissance, remains to be assessed. I started work on his life and writings with the presumption that he was, as he has often been called, the one significant and original philosopher of the late Byzantine Empire. Of this I have become increasingly sceptical. Certainly he can be, and perhaps has been, overrated as a philosopher. But I have come to the conclusion that he was indeed an influential figure in the cultural history of Europe for reasons other than those usually supposed.

It is probably true that he was the first competent interpreter of both Platonism and Aristotelianism to address Latin audiences in Greek for a thousand years. That fact alone should have assured him of an interested audience. When he did so, the process of translating Plato into Latin was still in its early stages, though the translation of Aristotle was almost complete. It was not until 1423 that the complete corpus of Plato's surviving works was available in the West even in the original Greek. The philosophical study of Plato, as distinct from the literary task of translation, had scarcely begun. In effect, it began with Gemistos' arrival.

But the outcome was not what he intended. He intended to establish Plato in the place of Aristotle as the foundation of metaphysical speculation, and hence of physical science as well. Instead he succeeded unintentionally in fascinating the West with Platonic imagery and poetry, which affected writers and artists more than philosophers and scientists. Philosophers continued for generations to adhere to Aristotelianism as interpreted in the scholastic tradition.

Even when they discarded Aristotle, it was not to put Plato in his place. But poets, painters, sculptors, and creators of works of imagination in general took Plato to their hearts. This would have disappointed Gemistos, who had little interest in the arts. But it was, willy-nilly, his real legacy to the West, which justifies Masai's assertion that 'l'action de Pléthon sur la Renaissance est certaine'.⁴

To make it intelligible how this came about, I have tried to summarize his life and writings with the minimum of intrusive commentary. Within the framework of a biography, I have included complete translations or summaries of all his published works: speeches, lectures, essays, letters, addresses, and commentaries. Since there are no English translations of his three major works—*De Differentiis*, the *Reply to George Scholarios' Defence of Aristotle*, and the *Book of Laws*—I have translated the first of these in full (Ch. XI), and given extensive summaries of the other two (Chs. XV and XVII). All his other writings are summarized in chronological order, so far as this can be established, at the appropriate periods of his life. The one important work not by Gemistos which I have also summarized is Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle* (Ch. XIII), since without it the controversy between the two men could not be understood.

I have divided the work into two parts, entitled *Gemistos* and *Plethon* because he adopted the latter name as his pseudonym at the crucial turning-point in his life, the year 1439, during his visit to Italy. I use the former name in the first part and the latter name in the second, although some of his contemporaries continued to call him Gemistos, or to use both names indiscriminately, after he made the change. Although he was about eighty years of age when he adopted the new name, all his important works were written subsequently, at least in their final form. The result is that the two parts of the book are roughly equal in length, although the second part covers little more than a dozen years of his life.

My intention has been to include everything necessary for the study of his life and works. But I must acknowledge the imperfect and interim character of the result. Much work remains to be done on Gemistos' manuscripts. A number of them (though not the most important) have never been published. Of those that have been published, new editions are required of at least two: *On the Events among the Greeks after the Battle of Mantinea*, published by H. G. Reichard in 1770; and the *Reply to Scholarios*, published by W. Gass in 1844. Both

⁴ Masai (1956), 342.

editions were based on inferior manuscripts; and in each case Gemistos' autograph is now available in Venice.⁵

Nevertheless I am grateful to several scholars for helping to ensure that this work is not more imperfect: to Professor Donald Nicol for reading and commenting on the typescript; to Mr Ian Crombie for similarly scrutinizing my translation of *De Differentiis*; to Mme Bernadette Lagarde for providing me with a copy of her doctoral thesis on *De Differentiis*; and to Mr Leofranc Holford-Strevens of the Oxford University Press for his editorial improvements of the text. I am also indebted to several Greek scholars, whose names will be found in the Bibliography; and especially to Mr Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, who first stimulated my interest in Gemistos Plethon.

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⁵ Diller (1956), 34; Masai (1954), 540-2.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Alexandre *Pléthon: Traité des Lois*, ed. C. Alexandre, tr. A. Pellissier (Paris 1858, repr. Amsterdam 1966)
- Anastos M. V. Anastos, 'Pletho's Calendar and Liturgy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 4 (1948), 183-305
- Bidez-Cumont J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque* (2 vols., Paris 1938)
- Bodnar E. W. Bodnar, *Cyriacus of Ancona and Athens* (Brussels-Berchem 1960)
- Chalkokondyles *Laonici Chalcocandylae Historiarum Demonstrationes*, ed. E. Darkó (2 vols., Budapest 1922-7)
- CSHB *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (50 vols., Bonn 1828-97)
- Dennis G. T. Dennis, *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus* (Dumbarton Oaks 1977)
- Diller (1937) A. Diller, 'A Geographical Treatise by Georgius Gemistus Pletho', *Isis*, 27 (1937), 441-51
- Diller (1956) A. Diller, 'The Autographs of Georgius Gemistus Pletho', *Scriptorium*, 10 (1956), 27-41
- Doukas *Ducæ Historia Turcobyzantina, 1341-1462*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest 1958)
- Ficino Marsilio Ficino, *Opera Omnia* (2 vols., Basle 1576, repr. Turin 1962)
- Geanakoplos D. J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance, 330-1600* (New Haven and London 1976)
- Gill (1959) J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge 1959)
- Gill (1964) J. Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays* (Oxford 1964)
- Kamariotes *Ματθαίου τοῦ Καμαριώτου λόγοι δύο πρὸς Πλήθωνα, περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*—*Matthaei Camariotae Orationes II in Plethonem, de Fato*, ed. H. S. Reimarus (Leiden 1721)
- Kanellopoulos P. Kanellopoulos, *Ἱστορία τοῦ Εὐρωπαϊκοῦ πνεύματος* (10 vols., Athens 1976)

- Kieszkowski B. Kieszkowski, *Studi sul platonismo del Rinascimento in Italia* (Florence 1936)
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- Lagarde B. Lagarde, 'Le "De Differentiis" de Pléthon d'après l'autographe de la Marcienne', *Byzantion*, 43 (1973), 312-43
- Lambros Sp. Lambros, *Παλαιολογία και Πελοποννησιακά* (4 vols., Athens 1912-30)
- Legrand (1892) É. Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe* (Paris 1892)
- Legrand (1962) É. Legrand, *Bibliographie hellénique des XV^e et XVI^e siècles* (4 vols., Paris 1885-1906, repr. 1962)
- Lewy H. Lewy, *The Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy—Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Cairo 1956)
- Mamalakis (1939) I. Mamalakis, *Ὁ Γεώργιος Γεμιστὸς Πλήθων* (Athens 1939)
- Mamalakis (1955) I. Mamalakis, *Ἡ ἐπίδρασι τῶν συγχρόνων γεγονότων στίς ἰδέες τοῦ Γεμιστοῦ* (Athens 1955, repr. from *Proceedings of the 9th Byzantine Conference at Thessaloniki*, ii. 498-532)
- Masai (1954) R. and F. Masai, 'L'Œuvre de Georges Gémiste Pléthon', *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres* (1954), 536-55
- Masai (1956) F. Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra* (Paris 1956)
- Mohler L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann* (3 vols., Paderborn 1923-42)
- Nicol D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453* (London 1972)
- Nikolaou (1971) Th. Nikolaou, "Ὁ Ζωροάστρης εἰς τὸ φιλοσοφικὸν σύστημα τοῦ Γ. Γεμιστοῦ-Πλήθωνος", *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*, 38 (1971), 300-39
- Nikolaou (1974) Th. Nikolaou, *Αἱ περὶ πολιτείας καὶ δικαίου ἰδέαι τοῦ Γ. Πλήθωνος Γεμιστοῦ* (Thessaloniki 1974)
- Opsopoeus *Oracula magica Zoroastris cum scholiis Plethonis et Pselli nunc primum editi*, with *Sibyllina Oracula*, ed. J. Opsopoeus (Paris 1599)
- PG *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graecolatina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris 1857-66)

- Runciman Steven Runciman, *Mistra* (London 1980)
- Scholarios *Œuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, ed. L. Petit, M. Jugie, and X. A. Sidéridès (8 vols., Paris 1928-36)
- Sphrantzes Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii 1401-77* and Pseudo-Phrantzes, *Cronica 1258-1481*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest 1966)
- Syropoulos *Les Mémoires du Grand Ecclésiarque de l'Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence, 1438-1439*, ed. V. Laurent (Rome 1971)
- Tatakis B. Tatakis, *La Philosophie byzantine* (2nd supplementary fascicle to E. Bréhier, *Histoire de la Philosophie*, Paris 1949)
- Tomadakis N. B. Tomadakis, "Γεώργιος-Γεμιστός Πλήθων (1360?-1452?)", *Συλλάβιον Βυζαντινῶν μελετῶν καὶ κειμένων*, 2 (1966), 151-9
- Trapezuntius *Comparationes phylosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis a Georgio Trapezuntio viro clarissimo* (Venice 1523, repr. Frankfurt 1965)
- Zaehner R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London 1961)
- Zakythinos D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée* (2 vols., Paris 1932 and Athens 1953; rev. edn., London 1975)
- Zisis Th. N. Zisis, *Γεννάδιος Β΄ Σχολάριος: Βίος, Συγγράμματα, Διδασκαλία* (Thessaloniki 1980)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHIES rapidly become out of date. The following lists are limited to works closely related to the life and writings of Gemistos Plethon and his associates.

Many of the works listed under *Abbreviations* include wider bibliographies: for example, Geanakoplos (1976), Gill (1959), Masai (1956), Nicol (1972), and Zakythinos (rev. 1975). For the late Byzantine Empire, see also *The Cambridge Medieval History*, iv (in two parts, Cambridge 1966-7); and for the early Italian Renaissance, see Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination* (London 1980).

A. GEMISTOS PLETHON

I. *Original texts*

Titles in English or Latin are those used in the present work. For further lists of unpublished manuscripts without specific titles, see section II.

Titles are listed as nearly as possible in their chronological order, apart from those in section (a), whose order is not ascertainable. These are listed in the order in which they appear in the present work.

Editions cited are those most easily accessible, which are not necessarily the earliest.

(a) *Teaching notes, excerpts and summaries*

Greek grammar, unpublished; see B. Lagarde, 'Georges Gémiste Pléthon, des Différences entre Platon et Aristote' (doctoral thesis, University of Paris, 1976), i, p. xxxviii

Περὶ Ὁμήρου—'On Homer', unpublished; see Masai (1956), 194 n. 2

Κεφάλαι' ἄττα λόγων μουσικῶν—'On musical theory', Alexandre, 458-65

Συνομὴ περὶ τινῶν μερῶν τῆς ῥητορικῆς—'Summary of Certain Elements of Rhetoric', ed. C. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci*, vi (Stuttgart 1834), 546-98; also in 'Anonymi Graeci Rhetorica cum versione Latina', ed. J. Scheffer, *Lectio-num Academicarum Liber* (Hamburg 1675), pt. 2, 1-31 (but mistakenly attributed on p. 33 to Matthew Kamariotes)

Διαγραφὴ ἀπάσης τῆς Πελοποννήσου παραλίου καὶ μεσογείου—'Description of the Entire Peloponnese, Coastal and Inland', *Ioannis Stobaei Eclogarum Libri duo*, ed. G. Canter (Antwerp 1575), 230-1

Chorographia Thessaliae—'Topography of Thessaly', unpublished; see PG 160, 781-2, para. 10

Μωαμὲτ ὁ Ἀράβων ἄρχων τε καὶ νομοθέτης—'Muhammad the Leader and

Legislator of the Arabs', ed. F. Klein-Franke, 'Die Geschichte des frühen Islam in einer Schrift des Georgios Gemistos Plethon', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 65 (1972), 5-8; with correction by D. Dedes, *Ἑλληνικά*, 33. 1 (1981), 66-7

Ἐκ τῶν Διοδώρου καὶ Πλουτάρχου περὶ τῶν μετὰ τὴν ἐν Μαντινείᾳ μάχην ἐν κεφαλαίοις διάληψις—'On the Events among the Greeks after the Battle of Mantinea'—*De iis quae post pugnam Mantinensem apud Graecos gesta sunt Libri II*, ed. H. G. Reichard (Leipzig 1770)

Ἐκ τοῦ Στράβωνος Γεωγραφικῶν, περὶ τοῦ τῆς γῆς τῆς οἰκουμένης σχήματος—'On the Shape of the inhabited world'—*De forma, magnitudine etc. Terrae*, ed. J. P. Siebenkees, *Anecdota Graeca* (Nuremberg 1798), 97-105

(b) *Political and occasional writings*

Προθεωρία εἰς τὸν λόγον τοῦ βασιλέως Μανουῆλ Παλαιολόγου ἐπιτάφιον εἰς τὸν αὐτοῦ ἀδελφὸν Θεόδωρον—'Preface to the Funeral Oration of the Emperor Manuel on his Brother Theodore', ed. J. Chrysostomides, *Manuel Palaeologus, Funeral Oration on his brother Theodore*, i (Thessaloniki 1985), 67-9; also in PG 156, 175-80; Lambros, iii. 3-7

Συμβουλευτικὸς πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην Θεόδωρον περὶ τῆς Πελοποννήσου λόγος—'Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore on the Peloponnese', ed. A. Ellissen, *Analekten der mittel- und neugriechischen Literatur*, iv. 2 (Leipzig 1860), 60-84; also in PG 160, 841-66; Lambros, iv. 113-35

Πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα (περὶ τοῦ ἰσθμοῦ)—'To the Emperor (Manuel) on the Isthmus', *De Isthmo*, Lambros, iii. 309-12 (but mistakenly stated to be addressed to John VIII)

Πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Ἐμμανουῆλον περὶ τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ πραγμάτων λόγος—'Address to the Emperor Manuel on affairs in the Peloponnese', ed. A. Ellissen, *Analekten der mittel- und neugriechischen Literatur*, iv. 2 (Leipzig 1860), 41-59; also in PG 160, 821-40; Lambros, iii. 246-65

Ἐπιτάφιος ἐπὶ τῇ τοῦ θειοτάτου ἡμῶν ἡγεμόνος κυρίου Θεοδώρου γυναικὶ κυρία Κλεόπη—'Funeral Oration on Cleope, wife of Theodore', ed. G. G. Fülleborn (Leipzig 1793); also in PG 160, 939-52; Lambros, iv. 161-75

Ἐπιτάφιος ἐπὶ τῇ βασιλίσση Ἑλένη Παλαιολογίνη—'Funeral Oration on the Empress Helen', PG 160, 951-8; Lambros, iii. 266-80

Προσφωνημάτιον πρὸς τὸν κύρ Δημήτριον δεσπότην τὸν πορφυρογέννητον—'Address to the Despot Demetrios', Lambros, iv. 207-10

(c) *Religious, philosophical, and didactic writings*

Περὶ τύχης—'On Fortune', unpublished; see G. Mercati, *Opere minori* iii (Studi e Testi, Vatican City 1937), 141 and n. 6; also Masai (1954), 554; text summarized in Masai (1956), 193-5

- Εὐχὴ εἰς τὸν ἕνα θεὸν*—'Prayer to the One God', Alexandre, App. I, 273-4
- Περὶ θεοῦ φυσικαὶ ἀποδείξεις*—'Natural Proofs of God', unpublished; see PG 160, 785-6, para. 22; Masai (1954), 550-1
- Μαγικὰ λόγια τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ζωροάστρου Μάγων ἐξηγηθέντα*—'Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles'—*Oracula magica Zoroastris cum scholiis Plethonis*, ed. J. Opsopoeus, *Sibyllina Oracula* (Paris 1599), 16-51; extracts in Alexandre, App. II, 274-81; Bidez-Cumont, ii. 279
- Βραχεῖά τις διασάφησις τῶν ἐν τοῖς λογίοις τούτοις ἀσαφεστέρως λεγομένων*—'Brief Explanation (of the Chaldaean Oracles)', ed. Kieszkowski, 161-3
- Περὶ ἀρετῶν*—'On Virtues', ed. A. Occon, *Quatuor virtutum iusta explicatio* (Basle 1552), 45-65; also in E. Fawconer, *Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ ἀρετῶν καὶ κακιῶν, Πλήθωνος περὶ ἀρετῶν* (Oxford 1752), 48-104; PG 160, 865-82
- Διόρθωσις ἐνίων τῶν οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὑπὸ Στράβωνος λεγομένων*—'Correction of Certain Errors made by Strabo', ed. Diller (1937), 442-6; earlier edn. by J. P. Siebenkees, *Anecdota Graeca* (Nuremberg 1798), 90-6
- Περὶ ὧν Ἀριστοτέλης πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαφέρεται*—'On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato'—*De Differentiis*, ed. B. Lagarde, *Byzantion*, 43 (1973), 312-43; earlier edn. by G. Chariander (Basle 1574); also in PG 160, 889-934
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- Βησσαρίωνι περὶ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*—'Letter to Bessarion on the Creator of the Heavens', PG 161, 717-22; Mohler, iii. 458-63
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- Μηνῶν καὶ ἐτῶν τάξεις, καὶ ἡμερῶν ἀπαρίθμησις*—'Ordering of Months and Years and Enumeration of Days', unpublished; see PG 160, 785-6, para. 21
- Canon chronologicus a Nabonassare ad imperatorem Michaellem Palaeologum*—'Chronological Table from Nabonassar to the Emperor Michael Palaiologos', unpublished; see PG 160, 781-2 n. (t)
- Τῷ αἰδησιμωτάτῳ [sic] Καρδινάλει Βησσαρίωνι*—'Further Letter to Cardinal Bessarion', PG 161, 721-4; Mohler, iii. 466-8
- Περὶ τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος*—*De processione Spiritus sancti*—'On the Procession of the Holy Spirit', unpublished; see PG 160, 789-90, para. 24; Masai (1954), 551-2, and Masai (1956), 324 n. 2
- Πρὸς τὸ ὑπὲρ τοῦ Λατινικοῦ δόγματος βιβλίον*—'Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine', ed. Dositheos, in *Τόμος Ἀγάπης* (Jassy 1698); also in Alexandre, App. VII, 300-11; PG 160, 975-80
- Πρὸς τὰς παρὰ τοῦ Βησσαρίωνος ἀντιλήψεις ἐπὶ τοῖς κατὰ τοῦ ὑπὲρ Λατίνων βιβλίου γραφεῖσιν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἀντιρρήτικοῖς*—'Letter to Bes-

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- Νόμων συγγραφή—‘Book of Laws’, Alexandre, 1-261, with French tr. by A. Pellissier
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PART I
GEMISTOS

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I

THE LOST SOUL

'ON the 26th of June of the 15th Indiction, a Monday, the teacher Gomostos died at the first hour of the day.' So wrote an anonymous hand in the margin of a manuscript now preserved at Munich.¹ On the reasonable assumption that by 'Gomostos' he meant George Gemistos, who called himself Plethon, the philosopher's death occurred in the early morning of Monday 26 June 1452, less than a year before the Turks captured Constantinople. Gemistos had been born in the capital of the dying Byzantine Empire, but he died at Mistra in the southern Peloponnese.

Historians of the day liked to call it Sparta, but Mistra stood a few miles west of the ancient site, not in the plain of the River Eurotas but on a spur of Mount Taygetos. It was founded as a fortress in 1249 by French colonists, the successors of the Crusaders who had captured Constantinople in 1204. The site was personally chosen by Guillaume de Villehardouin, the fourth Prince of Achaia under the Latin Empire. But much had changed in the two centuries between the foundation of Mistra and Gemistos' death there.

The French held the fortress for only twelve years. In 1259 Guillaume de Villehardouin was defeated and captured by a Byzantine army in the battle of Pelagonia. The high point of the Greeks' conquest of the Latin Empire came in 1261 with the recovery of Constantinople by the forces of Michael VIII Palaiologos, the founder of the last Byzantine dynasty. Guillaume was obliged to cede four forts in the southern Peloponnese—Mistra, Geraki, Maina, and Monemvasia—as the price of his freedom. A small part of the Peloponnese thus became again a Byzantine province. But the Franks tried to recover the lost territory by force of arms. The Greeks living in the neighbourhood then took refuge on the hill under the protection of Mistra, which grew from a fortress into a walled town. During the following century it became a small but important provincial capital.

The rise of Mistra was almost the only bright spot in the history of the Peloponnese during the fourteenth century. The surrounding

¹ Alexandre, p. xliii n. 2; M. Jugie, 'La date de la mort de Gémiste Pléthon', *Échos d'Orient*, 38 (1935), 160-1; Masai (1956), 363 n. 1.

country was poor and desolate, constantly overrun by the warring armies of the Greeks and Franks, or ravaged by Norman, Catalan, and Turkish raiders. The Frankish Principality of Achaia, which had once included the whole Peloponnese, was so impoverished that it had to import food and animals from Italy. The Greek Despotate of Morea was ruined by the violence and greed of rebellious land-owners. Serfdom still survived there, an indication of technical backwardness; natural resources such as the minerals and timber of Mount Taygetos were undeveloped.

In the middle of the fourteenth century the prospect slightly improved with the establishment of members of the imperial family—first the Cantacuzenes from 1349 to 1382, and then the Palaiologoi from 1383 to the end—as semi-autonomous Despots. Under the Palaiologoi most of the Peloponnese was eventually reconquered from the Franks. But Mistra was never more than a small oasis in a desert of anarchy and confusion. The lamentable state of the Peloponnese is documented by many contemporary writers, including the Emperor Manuel II (1391-1425), Demetrios Kydones, Demetrios Chrysoloras, Isidore of Monemvasia, the satirist Mazaris, and Gemistos himself.²

Compared with the rest of the Empire, however, its importance and prosperity grew. It became a cosmopolitan city, attracting Franks, Spaniards, Jews, Venetians, Genoese, and Florentines. In the fifteenth century it ranked next to the capital and Thessalonica; then, after Thessalonica was ceded to Venice in 1423 and finally captured by the Turks in 1430, it stood second to Constantinople alone. The only other Greek city of importance still free was Trebizond on the Black Sea, which had been ruled by an independent Greek Emperor of the Komnenos family since the time of the Latin conquest. Argos, Corinth, Patras, and Nauplia were held by the Venetians, together with Methoni and Koroni; Athens and Thebes formed part of a Florentine Duchy; Arta was held by the Italian Count of Cephallonia. They had passed through many vicissitudes, but none was in Greek hands at the opening of the fifteenth century. Nothing remained to the Byzantine Empire outside Constantinople and its near environs except one or two islands and a few towns in the Peloponnese, of which Mistra was virtually an independent capital. It was there that Gemistos spent almost the whole of the second half of his life.

² For references, see Zakythinos, i. 173-6.

Gemistos was a very old man when he died in June 1452; no one knew exactly how old. After his death, George Trapezuntius wrote that he had completed 'almost a hundred years of this miserable life'.³ George Scholarios, writing in 1450 when Gemistos was still alive, compared him with Tithonos, the equivalent in Greek mythology of Methuselah.⁴ Both Trapezuntius and Scholarios were bitter critics of Gemistos, and both were very much younger men; but there was no reason why they should be mistaken about his approximate age. Their estimates were corroborated by a funeral oration delivered in his honour, which compared him with both Tithonos and Methuselah.⁵ An Italian friend, Francesco Filelfo, wrote to the same effect, calling him 'pretty aged' (*admodum senex*) in 1441.⁶

On the basis of these estimates it is only possible to guess his date of birth. Guesses have ranged from 1350 to 1389, but both extremes can be ruled out. If he had passed 100 when he died in 1452, the fact would have been remarked in the funeral orations; if he had been only in his sixties, he could hardly have been compared with Tithonos or Methuselah; and in neither case could he have been described by Trapezuntius as 'almost a hundred'. The most reasonable guess is that he was born between 1355 and 1360.

The chronological context of his life is interesting. It coincided with the last century of the Byzantine Empire and the first century of the Italian Renaissance, in both of which Gemistos played a part. It also coincided with the Hundred Years' War between France and England. That war played a part in the emergence of nation-states in the west, which was a development that Gemistos hoped also to promote in Greece. But it also helped to frustrate efforts to raise forces in the west to save Constantinople from the Turks.

About the time of Gemistos' birth, the Italian Renaissance was just beginning. Cola di Rienzi had recently failed in his enterprise of restoring the Roman Republic (1354). Boccaccio was completing the *Decameron* (1358) and Petrarch was sighing over his manuscript of Homer, which he cherished but could not read. With their joint encouragement, the first professorship of Greek was established at Florence in 1360, but its holder, Leontius Pilatus, was a mediocrity and it did not flourish. In the same year was born Giovanni de'

³ Alexandre, p. xl n. 2; Legrand (1962), iii. 289.

⁴ Scholarios, iv. 150

⁵ PG 160, 809 D.

⁶ Filelfo, *Epistole* (Paris 1503?), p. lvij; Alexandre, p. xx n. 1.

Medici, the father of Cosimo and founder of the family's fortunes, a near contemporary of Gemistos.

During the presumed decade of Gemistos' birth a kind of humanism was also emerging in the Byzantine world. It was reflected at Constantinople in the scholarly disputes between Platonists and Aristotelians; at Thessalonica in the controversy between Hesychasts and their opponents; at Mistra in the copying of classical manuscripts and the painting of frescoes in a style reminiscent of the Italian *Trecento*. A significant event about the time when Gemistos was born was the completion by the great scholar Demetrios Kydones, in 1354, of his translation of St Thomas Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles*, the first major work of Latin theology to be presented to the Greeks in their own language.

In the middle 1350s the dying Empire itself saw a faint gleam of hope. The religious controversy, which tore the Orthodox Church apart, had ended in 1351 with the victory of the Hesychasts, whose mystical doctrines then became part of Orthodoxy. The struggle between John V Palaiologos and his usurping father-in-law, John VI Cantacuzene, had ended with the enforced abdication of the latter in 1354. The threat to the Empire by the powerful Serb ruler, Stephen Dušan, who had actually claimed the title of Emperor, ended with his death in 1355. In the same year the restored Emperor John V (1354-91) sought reunion with the Catholic Church and offered his personal submission to the Pope, in return for military aid against the Turks.

But the Pope had no troops to send. Meanwhile in 1354 the Turks had taken Gallipoli (Kallipolis), their first foothold on the European mainland. Hitherto they had served as mercenaries in the Greek civil war; now they were established in Europe for good. Gemistos' lifespan therefore also coincided with the century in which the Ottoman Empire came into being, not in Anatolia but in Europe.

When he died, the world was greatly changed, and even greater changes were about to come. In western Europe the first nation-states had emerged; in eastern Europe the nation-state which Gemistos had conceived was about to be destroyed. The Renaissance was in flower, though its greatest glories were still to come. Gemistos died as one of the most revolutionary generations in European history was about to be born. Aldus Manutius, the Venetian printer of Greek texts, was born in 1450, two years before Gemistos' death; the explorers Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci in 1451; Savonarola, the scourge of Italian humanism, and Leonardo da Vinci in 1452; Erasmus

in 1466, Copernicus in 1473, Luther in 1483. Within half a century of Gemistos' death the intellectual as well as the geographical and historical map of the world had dramatically changed.

Gemistos never heard of America and never saw a printed book. He never saw a play acted on the stage. He perhaps saw and even heard a cannon; he must have seen a mechanical clock, in Florence if not in Constantinople, but never at Mistra. He did not live to see his native city fall to the Turks, though he foresaw the enslavement of his people. Other Greeks also foresaw it, but few shared his belief that a new age was beginning as the old one died, for pious Greeks believed that the world was coming to an end in 1492 (AM 7000, the year in which, instead, the new world was discovered). Although his philosophical outlook was ostensibly conservative and even reactionary, it was in reality prophetic and even revolutionary. There is good reason for calling him both the last of the Hellenes, in the sense of pagans of the classical age, and the first of the Greeks, in the sense of modern nationalists.

Gemistos was buried at Mistra, though his remains are no longer there. He received an Orthodox Christian burial, for few knew or wished to know that he was a heretic. All that is known of his funeral is that two panegyrics were delivered, both of which survive. One was by an otherwise unknown monk called Gregorios, the other by a slightly better-known but still shadowy figure called Hieronymos Charitonymos, whose name is also given as Christonymos and Hermonymos in the manuscripts.⁷

To judge from their orations, the monk Gregorios was the more interesting of the two men at that date, because he had been accepted by Gemistos as a pupil, whereas Charitonymos had not. At first sight this is surprising, for Gemistos was contemptuous of monasticism. But several of his pupils were monks, whom perhaps he hoped to guide to more useful lives. Nothing more is known of Gregorios, but Charitonymos is better documented. He seems to have been a tiresome and querulous man, capable of expressing himself with extreme silliness. 'I who used to be more silent than a fish have been made, by this unbearable loss, more loquacious than a cicada', was a typical exclamation.⁸ Probably he was identical with Charitonymos Hermonymos, who delivered a funeral oration over the wife of the Despot

⁷ Texts in PG 160, 805-12 (Charitonymos); 811-20 (Gregorios).

⁸ PG 160, 806 A.

Thomas Palaiologos in 1462.⁹ He was also once thought to be identical with George Hermonymus of Sparta, who later escaped to Rome and subsequently taught Greek in Paris from 1476; but this is mistaken, for manuscripts by both men survive, and their handwriting is clearly different.¹⁰

Funeral orations are not always revealing, but those in honour of Gemistos tell something of his character. The two panegyrists had much the same things to say about his merits, and their profuse lamentations were mostly indistinguishable. The one significant difference was that Gregorios had been initiated into Gemistos' esoteric teaching. Both men spoke of him as a 'leader of initiates' (*μυσταγωγός*), implying that he had formed some kind of private circle, but only Gregorios knew exactly what it meant.¹¹

Gregorios referred enthusiastically to his generosity and kindness in imparting 'abundantly every day the sweet and divine spring to those who wished', and added that 'he was never seen to be jealous of the enjoyment of everything by anyone, as we see happening daily with others'.¹² But Charitonimos' experience was different. Apostrophizing the dead philosopher in a sardonic phrase, he said: 'You never could be hard on anyone whatever, except on a few, perhaps from the same harshness and arrogance which you showed towards me'.¹³ Every approach that Charitonimos made to Gemistos was repulsed, he said, though everyone else was made welcome. Still, he would not blame Gemistos himself, but attribute it to old age and 'perhaps the insinuation of certain slanderers'.¹⁴ These enigmatic words suggest the reason why he was less explicit in his praises than Gregorios, who used language derived directly from Gemistos' own philosophy.

Both men praised him for the four traditional virtues of prudence, courage, justice, and wisdom, which had been the subject of an essay by Gemistos himself. Only Gregorios was able to interpret his wisdom in Gemistos' own language. Charitonimos spoke of his knowledge of 'things human and divine, in counsel and in action, in military and civil affairs, in scientific and practical matters', and of his mastery of 'things known in speech, both theoretically and in practice, and things known by the mind alone, and things known in harmony and diagrams

⁹ Lambros, iv. 267-73.

¹⁰ H. Omont, *Georges Hermonyme de Sparte* (Paris 1885), 6. Omont reproduces his handwriting (p. 12), which can be compared with that of Hieronimos Charitonimos in Marc. gr. 206 at Venice.

¹¹ PG 160, 807 C; 813 B-C.

¹² Ibid. 813 C.

¹³ Ibid. 811 C.

¹⁴ Ibid. 812 B.

and numbers and the revolution of heavenly bodies'.¹⁵ But all this was exceedingly vague.

There were only two points in Charitonimos' speech which were not to be found in that of Gregorios. One was that Gemistos 'criticized Aristotle's philosophy, which some had previously praised as divine, calling it mere childishness'.¹⁶ The other was that he displayed a capacity for divination equal to that of Calchas.¹⁷ For the rest, one must turn to Gregorios, who knew what Gemistos actually taught.

His speech began in conventional style, lamenting the death of Gemistos as more calamitous than a barbarian invasion or an earthquake.¹⁸ After a number of extravagant expressions of grief, Gregorios went on to define Gemistos' greatness in words which were intended to emphasize the reconciliation of secular and theological learning:

Gone is the man of much experience in secret and divine matters, the leader of initiates in high and heavenly doctrines, the amplest and godliest intellect, the divine leader in high philosophy, the man who enquired scientifically into the whole of divine wisdom and the whole of human wisdom, who through natural skill and memory and greatness of mind gathered more than a natural share of wisdom. . . .¹⁹

Here and throughout his speech, Gregorios was at pains to show that Gemistos' devotion to secular philosophy was in no way inconsistent with theological orthodoxy.

He made the same point more unmistakably soon afterwards, when he invoked the names of St Paul and David immediately before a passage of almost blatant Neoplatonism. He described how Gemistos not only led all men towards the glory of the supracelestial God, on whom the great Plato also says that the eyes in man's head are fixed, by means of the inherent beauty and order of virtue; but also through the affinity of our mind with the intelligible he guided those who chose more easily and surely than by the eyes towards intelligible beauty.²⁰

In other words he sought exact knowledge through reason rather than sensation. He subordinated the bodily senses to the intellect, which is 'the greatest of all struggles, without which it is almost impossible to be united with the intelligible God'.²¹

Here was introduced one of the favourite doctrines of the Neoplatonists: that of assimilation to or union with God. There immediately

¹⁵ Ibid. 807 C; 808 B.

¹⁶ Ibid. 808 A.

¹⁷ Ibid. 808 D.

¹⁸ Ibid. 812 D-13 A.

¹⁹ Ibid. 813 B-C.

²⁰ Ibid. 814 C.

²¹ Ibid. 815 D-16 A.

followed another Neoplatonic doctrine, that of intermediary beings between the transcendent God and man, for Gemistos 'was not far from rivalling the angels in the self-sufficiency of his way of life, just as he appeared their equal in intellectual activity'.²² Neoplatonic *δαίμονες* (daemons) could safely be identified with Christian angels, but Gregorios' real thought was revealed in the next sentence: 'For this man ate the bread of angels, which bread is thought to be, I judge, the contemplation of the intelligible and the comprehension of God's creations'.²³

As if aware that he had been treading on dangerous ground for an Orthodox monk, Gregorios then digressed into an encomium of Gemistos' exercise of the four virtues. Again he showed more awareness of Gemistos' originality than Charitonimos in his illustrations. As to prudence, Gemistos was 'like an image of the intelligible and sensible order'.²⁴ Plato said that God presented himself as an example of all that was good, but 'this man entirely on his own, so far as is humanly possible, was revealed as an image of God'.²⁵ As to courage, he showed it in putting up with difficulties caused by others ('which actually very rarely occurred') and also with 'the misfortunes which are sometimes sent for our benefit by the divinity which decrees everything in this world'.²⁶ Here was a glimpse of Gemistos' determinism.

As to justice, Gemistos followed Plato in being willing to forgo private advantage for the public benefit.²⁷ Finally, his wisdom was shown not only in the study of eternal and divine matters but also in that of natural science. Here Gregorios referred again to 'secret matters', to metaphysics, to physics, and to political science.²⁸ Eminent philosophers used to visit him from all over the world, because his wisdom exceeded that of Solomon and Palamedes ('who first invented hours and the measurement of months, as well as dice').²⁹

Gemistos, on the other hand, made a much more important discovery: he found philosophy in a deficient state, and he restored it. Thus:

He laid down the easiest route to knowledge for those who chose; he exposed with complete accuracy and wisdom the false route which misled some men; and he liberated the human race from its supreme deception. Proof of what I have said lies in the wise and brilliant writings of that blessed and divine soul; and whoever faithfully follows them in every respect could not miss the sacred truth.³⁰

²² PG 160, 816 A.

²⁵ Ibid. 816 B-C.

²⁸ Ibid. 817 C-D.

²³ Ibid. 816 A.

²⁶ Ibid. 816 C.

²⁹ Ibid. 817 D-18 A.

²⁴ Ibid. 816 B.

²⁷ Ibid. 817 A.

³⁰ Ibid. 818 A-B.

These sentences hint at an esoteric philosophy of a novel, unorthodox, and even revolutionary kind. It was only revealed to 'those who chose'—a word which is sometimes mistranslated as 'the chosen';³¹ though it is true that they had also to be chosen for acceptance. It was hidden from those who took the 'false route'—perhaps a discreet allusion to Gemistos' habit of denouncing Christian theologians as 'sophists'. It was embodied in certain texts (*συγγράμματα*)—perhaps an allusion to Gemistos' last work, the *Book of Laws* (*Νόμων Συγγραφή*). Gregorios clearly knew what he was talking about.

After a further lament on his personal loss, Gregorios comforted himself with the thought that death meant 'not a complete destitution but a departure of our better part to some divine, intelligible place, much more divine and better than here'. He explained that the soul was indestructible, unlike the body, which disintegrates 'because it is composite, and composition is the origin of destruction'.³² There followed a long exposition of the relationship between body and soul in terms which Gregorios had evidently learned from Gemistos, leading to the conclusion that God must have made the soul immortal because he is himself immortal and good and incapable of jealousy.

A further argument followed, which was characteristic of Gemistos and borrowed from Plato: that no one willingly renounces life, and therefore the soul, which is the essential part of man, must continue to live even when the body is dead.³³ If this were not so, then God would be responsible for something evil. But in fact God is 'not in reality the cause of all things but only of good things'.³⁴ Gemistos had often used this argument. It is found only in Gregorios' speech, not in that of Charitonimos.

The two panegyrists came together again on one single point, which was almost the only historical fact in Gemistos' life that either of them mentioned. For once Charitonimos was the more precise. 'Greeks and barbarians alike admired him,' he said; 'especially those living in the west who had sufficient experience of his wisdom.'³⁵ Gregorios said that not only Greeks but the 'best of the Romans' admired him, and the latter admitted that they were ignorant in

³¹ F. Schultze, *Georgios Gemistos Plethon und seine reformatorischen Bestrebungen* (Jena 1874), 52: 'seine erwählten Jünger'; F. Fiorentino, *Il Risorgimento filosofico nel Quattrocento* (Naples 1885), 236: 'pochi Eletti'; corrected by Mamalakis (1939), 239.

³² PG 160, 818 C-D.

³³ Ibid. 818 D-19C.

³⁴ Ibid. 820 B.

³⁵ Ibid. 807 C-D.

³⁶ Ibid. 813 D.

comparison with him.³⁶ Charitonimos elaborated these remarks in detail:

When there was a wonderful gathering in the West of wise and eminent men, and a great debate on the matter of the Church's doctrines, how can one describe the admiration they felt for this man's wisdom and virtue and his powers of argument? He shone among them more brightly than the sun. They regarded him as their common teacher, the common benefactor of mankind, the common pride of nature. They called him Plato and Socrates, for he was not inferior to those two in wisdom, as everybody would agree.³⁷

Thus spoke Charitonimos on the impression made by Gemistos at the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438-9. He did not claim first-hand knowledge, and his enthusiasm carried him away. The true extent of Gemistos' immediate success in Italy, particularly with his lectures on Plato and Aristotle, remains to be assessed. It is clear at least that he made comparatively little impact on the proceedings of the Council. On the other hand, the visit to Italy was a turning-point in his own life, since virtually all his major works were written, or at least completed, in or after 1439. As a turning-point, it came remarkably late in his life, when he was already nearing or even past the age of eighty. It was only after his return from Italy that he exposed himself, almost without camouflage, to the charge of paganism. Yet he still did not forfeit the admiration of his contemporaries, including devout Christians.

Both panegyrists insisted on Gemistos' piety, but in subtly different language. Gregorios drew parallels to him from both biblical and ecclesiastical history and also from classical antiquity and mythology. He compared Gemistos with Solomon and Minos, and with Joseph and Bellerophon. He traced his intellectual ancestry to Plato, Thucydides, and Xenophon on the one hand, and to St Basil, St John Chrysostom, and St Gregory of Nazianzus on the other. He applied the same description of a 'divine leader of initiates' to St Paul as to Gemistos.³⁸ When he spoke of Hellenes, in contrast to Romans, he followed Gemistos' practice of meaning all Greeks of all periods, not distinguishing ancient pagans from modern Christians. As a monk himself, he seems to have been aware that Gemistos was under suspicion of apostasy, and therefore needed to be defended in terms of Christian orthodoxy as well as pagan philosophy. These points seem to have been lost on Charitonimos, whose parallels were drawn solely from classical antiquity, apart from one reference to Methuselah.

³⁷ PG 160, 807 D.

³⁸ Ibid. 814 B.

Gregorios and Charitonymos were not the only eulogists of Gemistos after his death. A circle of admirers survived, most of whom escaped to Italy after the fall of Constantinople. None was more eloquent than an anonymous scribe who wrote an impassioned lament on the destruction of Gemistos' *Book of Laws* by his severest critic, George Scholarios.³⁹ The latter he described as 'a jealous and uneducated person', who would be for ever blamed and detested by 'the best of the Hellenes'. But to Gemistos he said: 'Your fame is immutable and need fear no envy'. He made an exhaustive list of Gemistos' qualities: first, love of truth, and then 'wisdom, virtue, learning, prudence, rhetoric, morality, literary style, self-restraint, legislative skill, humanity, political judgment, liberality, emulation of the deeds and morals of antiquity, nobility, piety, justice, poverty, simplicity of life'. Scholarios himself would not have denied Gemistos most of these qualities, apart from piety (*θεοσέβεια*), which meant different things to each of them.

An even more striking testimony is to be found in two letters written by Cardinal Bessarion, who had once been Gemistos' pupil. This eminent Greek Catholic, who had lived in Italy since 1441, was so highly regarded at Rome that he was twice a serious candidate for the papacy, in 1455 and 1471. Like Gregorios and Charitonymos, he too had once described Gemistos as a 'leader of initiates'.⁴⁰ On his death he wrote a letter of condolence to Gemistos' two sons, Demetrios and Andronikos, in terms which implied that his old teacher's paganism was well known to him:

I have learned that our common father and master has shed every earthly element and departed to heaven, to the place of purity, joining the mystical chorus of Iacchus with the Olympian gods. I too rejoice to have studied with such a man, the wisest that Greece has produced since Plato (leaving Aristotle out of account). So if one were to accept the doctrines of the Pythagoreans and Plato about the infinite ascent and descent of souls, I should not hesitate even to add that the soul of Plato, having to obey the irrefragable decrees of Adrasteia and to discharge the obligatory cycle, had come down to earth and assumed the frame and life of Gemistos.⁴¹

He added some phrases about Gemistos' imperishable fame, and an epitaph in three elegiac couplets of warm admiration but poor prosody.

³⁹ Alexandre, 408-11.

⁴⁰ Mohler, iii. 456. 35.

⁴¹ Text in Mohler, iii. 468-9; Alexandre, 404-6; PG 161, 695-8. There are textual discrepancies between the manuscripts, which do not affect the sense: see Masai (1956), 307.

The phraseology of this letter follows closely that of Plato's *Phaedrus*, which describes the cycle through which the soul passes between this world and the other world every ten thousand years. Certain phrases, such as 'the decrees ofAdrasteia (Fate)' and 'the blessed chorus', are explicitly Platonic.⁴² The same phraseology had been taken over by the Neoplatonists. Bessarion must have been conscious that he was using Neoplatonic vocabulary, though the term did not yet exist to distinguish Plato's original doctrines from the elaborations of his successors. He was using the language of allegory, which would already be familiar to educated Greeks and not taken literally. Gemistos himself had commended 'the language of myth',⁴³ and Bessarion was his pupil. Within a generation the practice became familiar in Italy, even among dignitaries of the Church. But the Greek Church was stricter in distinguishing between classical learning and theology. To apply Platonic vocabulary to religious matters would be shocking in the eyes of a rigidly Orthodox Greek, such as Scholarios.

Evidently Bessarion did not intend that his unorthodox eulogy of his old teacher should be treated as confidential, for he sent a copy of it with a covering letter to Nicholas Secundinus, a mutual friend who had accompanied the Greek delegation to the Council of Union in 1438 as an interpreter, and had later entered the service of the papacy. In the covering letter he repeated his praises of Gemistos still more emphatically.⁴⁴ 'He was veritably the paragon of philosophy and every kind of wisdom.' His skill was not confined to literary expression, but embraced music, geometry, arithmetic, metaphysics, theology, and physics. He also showed himself a model of moral philosophy in his practical conduct, so that Diogenes and the Stoics were not to be compared with him. 'For he adopted their gravity and seemliness and self-sufficiency, but rejected their pretentiousness, self-satisfaction, and ostentation.'

Bessarion added that he had admired Gemistos more than anyone else he had ever met. As a philosopher, he never knew anyone so indifferent to the worldly present, nor one who so completely abstained from sophistical triviality and was so indefatigable in the search for truth. He concluded:

That is why we have said much to honour him greatly in these few words. Even with many more words we could not say all that ought to be said. But

⁴² *Phaedrus*, 248 C; 250 B. ⁴³ PG 160, 985 B.

⁴⁴ Mohler, iii. 470; PG 161, 697-8.

it suffices to honour a man who surpasses both ourselves and the heroes of the past with silent admiration rather than words.

There was nothing in Bessarion's letter to Secundinus which alluded so directly to Gemistos' peculiar beliefs as in his letter to Gemistos' sons. Only the word 'sophistical' echoed a favourite epithet used by Gemistos, but anyone might use the word without necessarily applying it, as Gemistos regularly did, to the bigoted theologians of Orthodoxy. Secundinus had not been a pupil of Gemistos, nor was he by training a philosopher. As a civil servant who specialized in translation, he had no mind for the eccentric subtleties of Gemistos.

With Bessarion it was another matter. He was one of the great scholars of his age, and not a man to use words lightly. He was one of the few Greeks, together with Scholarios, who could read both the ancient Greek philosophers and the modern Latin theologians in their original language. He was also a loyal servant of the ostensibly reunited Church. When he used seemingly heretical language in his letter of condolence to Gemistos' sons, he cannot be supposed to have intended to endorse their father's paganism. Yet undeniably he was exposing himself to misunderstanding and criticism.

When the critics set to work on Gemistos' reputation in the following generation, some of them did not spare Bessarion as well. The earliest was Scholarios himself, who entered monastic life as the 'humble monk' Gennadios in 1450 and became the first Patriarch of Constantinople under the Ottoman Empire. He was followed by George Trapezuntius (called 'of Trebizond' because his parents came from that city, though he himself was born in Crete), and by Theodore Gazis (in Latin, Gaza). Both men had settled in Italy, Trapezuntius in 1417 and Gazis between 1430 and 1440; and both entered the Roman Catholic Church. In the Orthodox Church, Scholarios' attacks on Gemistos were echoed by Matthew Kamariotes (Camariota) and Manuel of Corinth (Peloponnesius), each of whom held the post of Grand Rhetor under Ottoman rule.⁴⁵

The attacks which these men launched on the reputation of Gemistos were bound also to touch Bessarion, directly or indirectly. In some cases they criticized him for defending Plato and his old tutor, in others for defecting to the Roman Catholic Church. Gemistos

⁴⁵ See pp. 362-3 below.

could be blamed both for teaching him Platonism and for weakening his faith in Orthodoxy. Bessarion had stopped short of paganism, but in many other respects he exemplified the freedom of thought which was Gemistos' most characteristic gift to his pupils. It was also, in the eyes of his enemies, Gemistos' most unforgiveable crime.

II

EDUCATION OF A HELLENE

'THIS great and noble man', said Gregorios the monk, 'was uncommonly distinguished in descent, in aspect, and in talent.'¹ Little can be said for certain about his descent, though the name Gemistos appears from time to time in documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It has been reasonably supposed that Demetrios Gemistos, who was *protonotarios* (Chief Secretary) of St Sophia in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and at the beginning of the fifteenth, was a close relative. He may actually have been the father of George Gemistos, because the latter's elder son was called Demetrios, and Christian names were often passed from grandfather to grandson. It is certain, in any case, that he was born of 'pious, holy and learned ancestry', as Scholarios confirms; and the family was probably closely connected with the Church.²

Some members of the family evidently entered monastic life. Another Gemistos of about the same date as George was probably a monk on Mount Athos.³ Such a vocation would not have pleased George Gemistos, who disapproved of monasticism (though with individual exceptions). It is impossible to say when or how he developed this distaste, for practically nothing is known of his early life before he reached the age of higher education. His early education undoubtedly began by following the usual course of the *trivium* (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music). All these subjects held his interest throughout his life, as is shown by the funeral orations and Bessarion's letters to his sons and Secundinus. There is evidence also in his later writings of his attention to every branch of the liberal arts. He compiled a Greek grammar;⁴ he displayed the art of rhetoric in his funeral orations and addresses to the royal family;⁵ he studied geography, corrected Strabo,⁶ and emended a manuscript of

¹ PG 160, 816 B.

² Masai (1956), 52-3; Scholarios, iv. 155. 2.

³ Dennis, 255.

⁴ B. Lagarde, 'Georges Gémiste Pléthon, Des Différences entre Platon et Aristote' (doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1976), i, p. xxxviii.

⁵ See pp. 87-8 below.

⁶ Diller (1937), 441-51.

Ptolemy;⁷ he drafted lecture-notes on Homer⁸ and on 'musical theory', meaning essentially prosody;⁹ he taught Bessarion 'all the liberal arts', and particularly mathematics;¹⁰ he wrote essays on astronomy, and devised a new calendar.¹¹ As for logic, it formed a rigorous framework for all his philosophical works.

His later works add substantially to the list of classical authors whom he studied. At various stages of his life he adopted the practice of writing summaries or excerpts of well-known works, possibly for teaching purposes, since before the invention of printing students could not expect to possess complete texts of every book they studied. A number of these summaries and excerpts, which survive in his own hand among the manuscripts bequeathed by Bessarion to the Library of San Marco in Venice, can be dated to the 1440s, when Gemistos was an old man.¹² But his knowledge of the authors presumably reflects a much earlier stage of his own academic career.¹³

If that is so, it can be inferred that he was particularly interested in the historians, both classical (Thucydides, Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus Siculus, Josephus, Appian, Arrian) and Byzantine (Procopius, Cedrenus, Zonaras); in biographers (Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius); in geography and astronomy (Strabo, Geminus, Ptolemy); in music and prosody (Aristoxenus, Aristides Quintilianus); in the natural sciences (Aristotle, Theophrastus, Aelian, Galen); in rhetoric (Hermogenes and others, on whom he wrote a commentary);¹⁴ and in moralistic writers (Prodicus the sophist, Lucian, and again Plutarch). Of the poets, he quoted Homer, Hesiod, Solon, Pindar, Euripides, Cleanthes; but he was more interested in the so-called Golden Verses attributed to Pythagoras, in the Orphic Hymns, and the Hymns of Proclus, from all of which he copied excerpts.¹⁵

His excerpts from classical authors in many cases appear in different

⁷ In the dedicatory preface to D. Calderinus, *Claudii Ptholemei Alexandrini Philosophi Cosmographia* (Rome 1478), it is said that he compared various Latin translations with a very ancient Greek manuscript *manu gemisti Philosophi emendato*.

⁸ Masai (1956), 194 n. 2.

⁹ Alexandre, 458-65; PG 160, 781-2, para. 12.

¹⁰ Mohler, iii. 406.

¹¹ Anastos, 193, 200; Alexandre, 58-63, 444-55.

¹² Diller (1956), 27-41.

¹³ The names listed in the following paragraph are in most cases to be found in L. Allatius, *De Georgiis et eorum scriptis diatriba* (Paris 1651), the relevant parts of which are reprinted in PG 160, 773-94.

¹⁴ C. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci* (Stuttgart 1834), vi. 546-98; to be distinguished from the *Epitome* of Hermogenes by Matthew Kamariotes in the same volume, 601-44.

¹⁵ Diller (1956), 37.

manuscripts under titles which disguise their true origin. What is called the 'Funeral Oration on the soldiers killed in the Peloponnese' (once in the Escorial Library, but now lost) was presumably an excerpt from Thucydides.¹⁶ An excerpt from Ptolemy is listed as 'Description of the entire Peloponnese, coastal and interior', and another from Strabo as 'Topography of Thessaly'.¹⁷ Excerpts from the twelfth-century historian Cedrenus are entitled 'Muhammad the leader and legislator of the Arabs', or 'On the successes of the Arabs under King Omar, and on the Emperor Heraclius and the Kings of the Romans'.¹⁸ The most often copied of his excerpts, based on Plutarch and Diodorus Siculus, is commonly known as 'On the events among the Greeks after the battle of Mantinea'. The surviving autograph seems to belong to a late period of his life, but he may have made copies more than once.¹⁹ Collectively, in any case, these summaries and excerpts presumably illustrate his life-long interests.

There are interesting omissions, however, from the catalogue of his excerpts. They fall mainly in the field of higher education: philosophy, theology, and law; and with them may be included Latin, which had entirely lapsed from the curriculum at one time, but became increasingly important in the last centuries of Byzantium. If the purpose of Gemistos' excerpts and summaries was teaching, the reason for the omissions is not far to seek. In the higher studies, especially philosophy, he preferred oral teaching. He liked to emphasize that Plato and the Pythagoreans distrusted the written word as the means of communicating their most important ideas. Apart from that prejudice, the major texts in these subjects would be difficult to summarize on paper.

The investigation of Gemistos' manuscripts is still in progress, but the scarcity of excerpts from the philosophers is already evident. Two excerpts from Plato (the *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*) have been identified, but no more.²⁰ (These are in any case enough to dispose of the intrinsically absurd theory, which was once put forward, that Gemistos hardly

¹⁶ Alexandre, pp. vii-viii n. 4.

¹⁷ PG 160, 777-8 n. (k); 781-2 n. (q).

¹⁸ Anastos, 271; PG 160, 779-80. Text in F. Klein-Franke, 'Die Geschichte des frühen Islam in einer Schrift des Georgios Gemistos Plethon', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 65 (1972), 3-8.

¹⁹ Diller (1956), 34. An early date (1413-14) is suggested by J. Dräseke, 'Zu Platon und Plethon', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 27 (n.s. 20) (1914), 294. Text in H. G. Reichard, *Georgii Gemisti Plethonis de iis quae post pugnam Mantinensem apud Graecos gesta sunt libri II* (Leipzig 1770).

²⁰ D. Dedes, 'Die Handschriften und das Werk des Georgios Gemistos (Plethon)', *Ελληνικά*, 33. 1 (1981), 72.

knew Plato's original works but only the Neoplatonists.²¹) The works of Aristotle are represented (apart from scientific works) only by two logical excerpts. Allatios mentions an *explicatio in voces Porphyrii et in decem Categorias Aristotelis* and another *in Analytica Aristotelis*. Neither has been found since, and Masai thought they might have been erroneously attributed to Gemistos; but in the second case this has recently been questioned.²² There is also a summary of a work erroneously attributed to Timaeus of Locri (the principal speaker in Plato's *Timaeus*), which is of much later date.²³ Finally, there is a passage probably derived from Kydones' translation of Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles*, containing a reference to Averroes.²⁴

The omission of Orthodox theology from his range of excerpts is also significant. If his father was a Church official, he must have had contact with the bases of Christian faith from childhood, but theology had little appeal for him. It was characteristic that when he made his only public intervention at the Council of Florence, and when he later wrote an essay on the Procession of the Holy Spirit, his reasoning was in each case based on pure logic without any apparent interest in the substance. His principal works show that he was well read in the Greek patristic literature, but he treated the Fathers with no particular reverence.

No Latin works fall within his known range of interest. It is uncertain whether he knew Latin at all, for the language was not taught as part of the normal curriculum. Some scholars, such as Demetrios Kydones in the fourteenth century and George Scholarios in the fifteenth, learnt it on their own initiative, but they were very exceptional. It has been asserted that Gemistos knew Latin, though without positive evidence;²⁵ and it has also been doubted.²⁶ Negative evidence, especially during his stay in Florence, supports the doubt. His essay 'On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato' (*De Differentiis*) was written, by his own account, at Florence in 1439 'for the benefit of those interested in Plato'.²⁷ Why then did he not write it in Latin if he was competent to do so, perhaps asking one of his Italian friends to correct it?

²¹ G. Voigt, *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Althertums*, ii (Berlin 1893), 120; Nikolaou (1971), 307.

²² PG 160, 783-4; Masai (1954), 549-50; Dedes, op. cit. 78-81.

²³ Diller (1956), 29.

²⁴ Dedes, op. cit. 72-5.

²⁵ Tomadakis, 151-3; Dedes, op. cit. 74.

²⁶ Masai (1956), 61; J. W. Taylor, *George Gemistus Pletho's Criticism of Plato and Aristotle* (Menasha, Wis. 1921), 20.

²⁷ PG 160, 1017 C-D.

Another negative indication is on record from the same date. A discussion took place between Bessarion and Theodore Gazis, at which Gemistos was present, on the Latinity of St Jerome.²⁸ It must have been during the Council of Union, either at Ferrara or at Florence, since on no other occasion were all three men together. The point of argument was whether Jerome's style was Ciceronian or not. Gazis showed his mastery of the subject; Bessarion too discussed it on equal terms. But Gemistos made no contribution to the discussion, apart from laughing at a witticism from Gazis.

A small clue is also provided by the occasion of a visit to Mistra in 1447 by Gemistos' Italian friend, Cyriac of Ancona, a businessman celebrated also as an antiquarian. Cyriac wrote out in his own hand a summary in Greek of the Latin version of a supposed diary of the Trojan War attributed to Diktys of Crete, the Greek original being lost.²⁹ Cyriac's manuscript survives, with a correction in Gemistos' hand. The question arises why Cyriac needed to write a summary in Greek if Gemistos could read Latin.

The same question arises over two other manuscripts of Cyriac from his last visits to Mistra: a poem in Italian in praise of the city, and an account in Greek of the Roman calendar.³⁰ The poem is accompanied by a prose translation in Greek, which would hardly have been necessary if Gemistos could read Italian (and that in turn would not have been hard if he knew Latin). Equally, in that case too, Cyriac need not have put himself to the trouble of writing his notes on the Roman calendar in Greek, which cannot have been easy for him. The conclusion is uncertain, but the presumption is that Gemistos had little if any Latin.

There is at any rate no trace of Latinity in Gemistos' extant works. It seems, however, that he must have had some training in the law, since both panegyrists at his funeral claimed for him a virtual omniscience in legal matters.³¹ If all existing legislation were lost, said Charitonios, he could draft it all again better than Solon or Lycurgus. But it was possible to be a competent lawyer without any knowledge of Latin, since Roman law was fully available in translation. In the days when the University of Constantinople flourished, the head of the law school was required to know Latin, and his pupils must have learned

²⁸ Petrus Crinitus, *De honesta disciplina*, ed. C. Angeleri (Rome 1955), bk. 1, ch. X, pp. 72-3.

²⁹ Diller (1956), 31. See pp. 227-8 below.

³⁰ Lambros, iv. 96-101; Zakythinos, i. 236; Bodnar, 62.

³¹ PG 160, 808 C; 817 A.

Latin also; but those days were over. The hyperbolic language of Gemistos' panegyrists cannot be stretched to prove that he knew Latin. The doubt must remain, with the probability against.

The study of subjects such as philosophy, theology, and law could only have entered Gemistos' experience at the level of higher education. At that level there had once been, in the great days of the Empire, a choice of direction: either the Patriarchal School, for theological students, or the secular University, for laymen. But by the fourteenth century both these institutions were moribund, if not defunct. Their place had been taken by private scholars who received pupils individually or in groups. A sufficiently qualified scholar would teach all subjects, from metaphysics to law.

Many students of theology did not proceed to become priests, so that laymen learned in theology were not uncommon, including some who became Patriarchs only after being ordained at the eleventh hour. Gemistos himself wrote several theological essays,³² but it is certain that he never studied at the Patriarchal School, even if the institution still existed. If he had, either his enemies or his friends would surely have mentioned the fact.

His natural course was to put himself under a private tutor. There were many such at Constantinople in the fourteenth century. The most eminent in the latter part of the century was Demetrios Kydones, who was some thirty years older than Gemistos. It has been suggested that Gemistos may have been his pupil.³³ They were certainly acquainted, for Gemistos wrote in a letter to his own pupil, Bessarion, that he had consulted Kydones about a passage in Plato's *Republic*.³⁴ But Gemistos' scholarship does not seem to bear the stamp of Kydones' tuition. Kydones was a Latinophile, a translator of Aquinas, and a convert to Roman Catholicism. Unlike some of Kydones' known pupils, Gemistos had no taste for Latin scholasticism.

It has also been suggested that Gemistos may have been a pupil of Nikephoros Gregoras, an eminent scientist, philosopher, and historian earlier in the fourteenth century.³⁵ Gregoras, who was a leading opponent of the new doctrine of Hesychasm in the Orthodox Church, had in his turn been strongly influenced by Theodore Metochites,

³² For examples, see Alexandre, 300-11; Masai (1956), 324 n. 2; PG 160, 785-6, para. 22, and 789-90, para. 24.

³³ Knös, 105; Mamalakis (1939), 43.

³⁴ Mohler, iii. 467.

³⁵ J. Gill in P. Whitting (ed.), *Byzantium—An Introduction* (Oxford 1971), 127.

who was also a man of great learning as well as a prominent figure in public life. The appeal of both Metochites and Gregoras in the eyes of Gemistos would have been their devotion to Plato in preference to Aristotle—a preference which was still comparatively rare and was abhorrent to the Orthodox Church. The three men could be seen as three links in the chain of secular humanism which was a feature of the last century and a half of Byzantium. But it is impossible that Gregoras should have been Gemistos' tutor in the literal sense, since he died about 1360, when Gemistos was only a child even on the earliest assumption about his birth.

Gemistos did, however, study under a private tutor, but a very different character from either Kydones or Gregoras. The only source for this stage of his education is Scholarios, a hostile witness who was writing after Gemistos' death about events before he himself was born. Scholarios presumably believed that he had reliable sources for the story which he told about Gemistos' association with a Jew called Elissaeus (Elisha), though some scholars have doubted its truth. Although he told the story at second hand, and with manifest prejudice, the circumstances were sufficiently dramatic to have become and remained well known in the close-knit circle of the Byzantine establishment; and on one or two points the implications of Scholarios' account are indirectly corroborated by evidence from Gemistos' own pen.

Elissaeus is otherwise unknown. An attempt has been made to identify him with the writer of a manuscript in Bessarion's bequest to San Marco.³⁶ This manuscript contains Greek translations of the Pentateuch and other books of the Old Testament, all in Attic Greek except the Book of Daniel, which is in Doric. It might equally be the work of a Christian or a Jew. An alternative suggestion has been made that the hand might be that of Simone Atumano, a Latin Archbishop of Thebes in the fourteenth century.³⁷ There is in any case no positive ground on which the writer can be supposed to have been Gemistos' tutor, except the link through Bessarion. The tenuous evidence scarcely justifies the identification with Elissaeus; thus the mysterious Jew remains on record only in Scholarios' story.

Scholarios gave two versions of his story. The first and fuller version is contained in a letter he wrote to the Princess Theodora

³⁶ F. Delitsch, preface to O. Gebhardt, *Graecus Venetus* (Leipzig 1875).

³⁷ G. Mercati, *Se la versione dall'Ebraico del codice veneto greco VII sia di Simone Atumano* (Rome 1916), 9-25.

Asenina, wife of Demetrios Palaiologos, the last Despot at Mistra. The date of the letter is uncertain, but it appears to have been written while Theodora and Demetrios were still at Mistra; in other words, before the city was captured by the Turks in 1460. A reasonably probable date is 1455 (when Scholarios was Patriarch under his new name, Gennadios), some three years after Gemistos' death.

Scholarios was seeking to explain the genesis of Gemistos' last and most heretical work, the *Book of Laws*, the manuscript of which he had received from Theodora, into whose hands it had come when Gemistos died. Scholarios detected the origin of Gemistos' heresies in his education, which he described in the following terms:

Before he had acquired the maturity of reason and education and the capacity of judgment in such matters—or rather, before he had even devoted himself to acquiring them—he was so dominated by Hellenic ideas that he took little trouble about learning traditional Christianity, apart from the most superficial aspects. In reality it was not for the sake of the Greek language, like all Christians, that he read and studied Greek literature—first the poets and then the philosophers—but in order to associate himself with them; and so in fact he did, as we know for certain from many who knew him in his youth.

It was natural in the case of a man under such influence, in the absence of divine grace, that through the demons with whom he associated there should have come a tendency towards an ineradicable adherence to error, as happened to Julian and many other apostates. The climax of his apostasy came later under the influence of a certain Jew with whom he studied, attracted by his skill as an interpreter of Aristotle. This Jew was an adherent of Averroes and other Persian and Arabic interpreters of Aristotle's works, which the Jews had translated into their own language, but he paid little regard to Moses or the beliefs and observances which the Jews received from him.

This man also expounded to Gemistos the doctrines of Zoroaster and others. He was ostensibly a Jew but in fact a Hellenist [pagan]. Gemistos stayed with him for a long time, not only as his pupil but also in his service, living at his expense, for he was one of the most influential men at the court of these barbarians. His name was Elissaeus. So Gemistos ended up as he did.

He tried to conceal his true character, but was unable to do so when he sought to implant his ideas among his pupils, and he was dismissed from the City by the pious Emperor Manuel and the Church. Their only mistake was that they refrained from denouncing him to the public, and failed to send him into dishonourable exile in barbarian territory, or in some other way to prevent the harm that was to come from him.³⁸

³⁸ Scholarios, iv. 152-3.

A shorter passage on the same theme was included in a letter from Scholarios to the Exarch Joseph (a senior Metropolitan exercising provincial jurisdiction, perhaps in the Peloponnese). Seeking to justify the destruction of the *Book of Laws*, Scholarios wrote as if apostrophizing the dead philosopher in the second person:

You first learned about Zoroaster, having no previous knowledge of him, from the polytheist Elissaeus, who was ostensibly a Jew. Departing from your own country, you lived with him in order to benefit from his famous teaching at a time when he enjoyed great influence at the court of the barbarians. Being what he was, he met his end in the flames, just like your Zoroaster.³⁹

Scholarios continued this letter with a further attack on the sources of Gemistos' philosophy, beginning with legendary figures of Greek prehistory (whom Gemistos had named in the *Book of Laws*) and followed by historical names such as Pythagoras, Plato, Plutarch, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus. All of these, he said, were openly named by Gemistos himself, except Proclus. 'But those who have read Proclus, and also condemned him, know as well as I do that he is the source of these theories.'

Apart from Elissaeus, three names stand out in Scholarios' indictment as sinister influences: Averroes, Proclus, and Zoroaster. They stand for important elements in Gemistos' philosophy: the interpretation (or misinterpretation) of Aristotle, Neoplatonism, and orientalism respectively. It would have been quite natural that he should have been introduced to all three by Elissaeus. The Jews were readily capable of providing a channel by which Persian and Arabic philosophy could reach the Greeks. Gemistos could not have read Averroes in Arabic, nor probably in Latin translation. He might have studied Proclus with a Greek, for there were Greek teachers at Constantinople in the fourteenth century who had an interest in Proclus; but they were scarce because of his pagan reputation. Elissaeus is again a more likely source, since it is unnecessary to suppose that Gemistos had more than one heretical teacher.

Zoroaster is another matter. His name is often cited by Gemistos, but indiscriminately as a symbol of the immemorial wisdom of the East. Gemistos could clearly not read Persian, for he mistranslated the only Persian word which appears in his surviving works. (He wrote that the Persian form of Cyrus' name—*Kūresh*—meant the sun;⁴⁰ but in fact the sun is *khoshīd*.) He also showed no first-hand knowledge of

³⁹ Ibid. iv. 162.

⁴⁰ Opsopoeus, 50-1; Alexandre, 279-80.

Zoroastrianism in either its original or its contemporary form. It has been pointed out that everything he wrote about Zoroaster can be found in classical Greek writers, chiefly Plato and Plutarch.⁴¹ There is no evidence to support the speculation that he used the name of Zoroaster as a screen for the doctrines of Islam.⁴²

It is true that Gemistos showed an academic interest in the study of Islam, but it did not go deep. His essay on Muhammad was simply extracted from Cedrenus, not from Muslim sources. He admired the successes of the Ottoman Turks, which he saw to be based on the Muslim faith, though he still followed the Greek practice of calling the Turks 'barbarians'. Arabs in their turn showed some interest in Gemistos. The surviving fragments of his *Book of Laws* were translated into Arabic before the end of the fifteenth century; but the translator himself recognized that they were incompatible with Islam.⁴³

George Trapezuntius, who considered Gemistos no less dangerous a heretic than Muhammad himself, reported him as saying that not many years after his death men would adopt a universal religion, which would be neither Christianity nor Islam but a revived paganism.⁴⁴ That gives the clue to the whole matter: Gemistos was as indifferent to Islam as to Christianity. But evidently his knowledge of Islam, such as it was, came in the first instance from Elissaeus and not from first-hand study. On the other hand, his sojourn with Elissaeus in an Ottoman environment also gave him some opportunity to see Muslim practices for himself.

Inevitably much mystery surrounds the story of Elissaeus' influence on Gemistos. It is not even certain where and when their association took place. The Ottoman capital had moved from Brusa to Adrianople in the 1360s, and the latter city would naturally be the seat of the 'court of the barbarians'. But Brusa remained the intellectual capital of the Ottoman Empire, and contained a large Jewish population. A modern historian has called Brusa 'the city of the theologians' in contrast with Adrianople, 'the city of the Ghazis' (religious warriors).⁴⁵ The former rather than the latter would seem to have been the natural choice for Gemistos' emigration from Constantinople, but it is uncertain. The dates of his departure from Constantinople, his return there, and his

⁴¹ Anastos, 281-9; Nikolaou (1971), 338.

⁴² Anastos, 270 ff.

⁴³ Id. 272.

⁴⁴ Alexandre, xvi n. 1; Legrand (1962), iii. 287.

⁴⁵ P. Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London 1938), 48.

second and final departure, to which Scholarios referred, are all equally obscure.

The fate of Elissaeus is also a mystery. It is usually assumed that he was burnt as a judicial punishment, though even this is uncertain, for there were instances in Byzantine history of religious dissidents being burnt in their own dwellings or immolating themselves. Nor does Scholarios say where or by whom Elissaeus was burnt. Execution by fire was practically unknown among the Turks: a rare instance is on record in which it was threatened but not carried out.⁴⁶ It was also rare among the Greeks: the most famous among the few known cases was the execution of the Bogomil leader, Basil, early in the twelfth century. Certain classes of heretic were condemned to death as such, normally by the sword; but Jews were a legal sect, though subject to disabilities and sometimes to persecution.

There were, however, offences for which a Jew could be burnt to death. One example, in the Theodosian code, was physical assault on a Jew converted to Christianity.⁴⁷ Although no historical case is known, this shows the possibility cannot be excluded that Elissaeus' death was a judicial execution at Constantinople. Penalties had tended to become more severe with the passage of time. When Harmenopoulos compiled the *Hexabiblos* in the fourteenth century, it had become a capital offence for a Jew to subvert a Christian, though the method of execution was not specified.⁴⁸ It was also a capital offence for a Christian to 'Hellenize'—that is, to revert to pagan practices (and according to Scholarios, Elissaeus was a secret 'Hellenist')—or for anyone to make sacrifices to pagan gods.⁴⁹ The persistent renewal of these clauses shows that the authorities believed the danger was still a reality.

Scholarios ominously drew attention to the last two provisions of the law in a letter which he wrote to a senior official in the Peloponnese about 1451-2.⁵⁰ Neither Gemistos nor Elissaeus was named in this letter, but internal evidence shows that its threat was aimed at Gemistos. There is no evidence that he or Elissaeus was guilty of the offences defined at the date of their association, but a dogmatic theologian such as Scholarios might readily have regarded them as guilty.

⁴⁶ Doukas, 235.

⁴⁷ *Codex Theodosianus*, ed. Th. Mommsen (Berlin 1954), xvi. 8. 1; C. Pharr, *The Theodosian Code* (Princeton 1952), 467.

⁴⁸ *Const. Harmenopuli Manuale legum sive Hexabiblos*, ed. G. E. Heimbach (Leipzig 1851), vi. 11. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* vi. 11. 4-5.

⁵⁰ Scholarios, iv. 487-8.

Gemistos himself never alluded to the fate of his teacher, nor even mentioned his name. But there was perhaps a hint of revenge to come in a provision which he included in his *Book of Laws*, that 'any sophist convicted of philosophizing contrary to these doctrines of ours shall be burnt alive'.⁵¹ For him the term 'sophists' regularly meant Orthodox theologians: in fact, men such as Scholarios.

The evidence on Gemistos' association with Elissaeus is too scanty to permit a firm conclusion. It remains possible that Elissaeus' death by fire was purely accidental. But if it was a judicial execution, it seems more likely that he was the victim of Byzantine than of Ottoman justice.⁵² In that case it would follow that Elissaeus as well as Gemistos returned from Turkish to Greek territory. Scholarios' evidence is neutral on this point. He does not link the death of Elissaeus with the second departure of Gemistos from the capital, but he implies a link between the latter event and the heretical doctrines which Gemistos had learned from Elissaeus and had tried to pass on to his own pupils. The dates can only be speculative, but since Scholarios names Manuel as the Emperor who required Gemistos to leave Constantinople, that event can only have taken place after 1391, when Manuel succeeded.

It seems clear that Gemistos had spent several years studying under Elissaeus and then several more teaching at Constantinople before his heresies were detected; but it is impossible to say how many. A number of clues combine to suggest that he did not leave Constantinople for good before the turn of the century. In the first decade of Manuel's reign, the new Emperor was much preoccupied with Turkish relations, and frequently absent from his capital. In 1391-2 he was detained at Ankara by the Sultan as his vassal. Though he escaped for long enough to establish himself on his throne, he was forced to return to his duties as a vassal in 1392, when he was appointed to command a Turkish fleet. In the winter of 1393-4 he was summoned to the Sultan's camp at Serrai, along with other vassals. In 1396-7 Constantinople itself was under siege by the Turks, while an army of western Crusaders was defeated at Nicopolis and the Turks invaded the Peloponnese. In December 1399 the Emperor left on a visit to the West, from which he returned only in June 1403, recalled by the good

⁵¹ Alexandre, 126-7.

⁵² F. Schultze, *Georgios Gemistos Plethon und seine reformatorische Bestrebungen* (Jena 1874), 28-30, assumed that he was executed by the Turks; similarly Mamalakis (1939), 47. Nikolaou (1971), 335-7, argued that this was impossible, and rejected Scholarios' whole story as probably fictitious. Runciman, 110, favoured the theory of accidental death.

news that the Turks had been defeated in July 1402 by the Mongol army of Timur-i-lenk (Tamerlaine) in the battle of Ankara.

There were intervals in these years when Manuel was neither absent nor under siege; and he could then have dealt with Gemistos' case. But there is another indication that Gemistos may have been still at Constantinople as late as 1405. It is known that one of his pupils was Mark Eugenikos, later the Metropolitan of Ephesus and the most implacable opponent of the Union of the Churches.⁵³ Mark studied under Gemistos only after his father died in 1405, and in that year Mark was not yet thirteen.⁵⁴ His brother John, who recorded these facts, did not say where he studied under Gemistos, but it seems unlikely that so rigidly Orthodox a pupil would have followed Gemistos after he had been expelled from Constantinople under suspicion of heresy. So Gemistos was presumably still at the capital after 1405.

Another consideration points to a similar conclusion. If Gemistos had been expelled before the turn of the century, there would be a long gap in his biography. Scholarios said that, regrettably, he was allowed to remain in Byzantine territory and not exiled abroad. It is not certain when he settled at Mistra, but there is no positive evidence of his presence there before 1409. It would be strange if he spent some years elsewhere in Byzantine territory without any trace of the fact having survived. The suggestion of a modern scholar linking his name with Thessalonica seems to be supported by no evidence, though Thessalonica had indeed a reputation for freedom of thought and intellectual activity.⁵⁵

Only two items of later evidence give a clue to the date of his first appearance at Mistra. One is the funeral oration by the Emperor Manuel on his brother, Theodore I, the Despot of Mistra, who died in 1407.⁵⁶ Of this speech Gemistos wrote a summary, which was called a *προθεωρία* or Preface.⁵⁷ This indicates that he was already associated with Mistra, where the speech was delivered. But the Emperor's speech was not in fact delivered until the second anniversary of Theodore's funeral, in 1409; and, paradoxically, the *προθεωρία* may have been written later still. The other clue lies in a Bull of Theodore II, the nephew and successor of Theodore I, granting to Gemistos certain

⁵³ Masai (1956), 59.

⁵⁴ Gill (1964), 55.

⁵⁵ G. Buckler, in N. H. Baynes and H. St. L. B. Moss (eds.), *Byzantium* (Oxford 1948), 214-5.

⁵⁶ PG 156, 181-308.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 175-80.

territorial privileges in 1433.⁵⁸ It states that Gemistos came to the Peloponnese 'a few years ago at the instance of my sacred master and king, my father'. Theodore II's father, the Emperor Manuel, had died in 1425, having been incapacitated since 1422. How long ago 'a few years' meant is impossible to say, but it could hardly have gone back to the turn of the century.

The evidence leaves the date of Gemistos' arrival at Mistra necessarily uncertain. Some scholars assume that it must have been soon after the death of Theodore I in 1407;⁵⁹ others date it as late as 1413.⁶⁰ All that can be said with confidence is that the longer the gap between his departure from Constantinople and his establishment at Mistra, the more puzzling would be the absence of any evidence of his activities and whereabouts in the interval. The most reasonable conclusion seems to be that he left the capital and settled at Mistra within the first decade of the fifteenth century, and nearer to the end than the beginning of that decade.

By that date he was probably approaching fifty years of age, and still virtually nothing is known of his life except what has been deduced from the sources in this chapter. Another uncertainty concerns his marriage. It is not known whom he married, nor when, nor where, nor whether his wife survived him. From his own silence and that of other sources it may be inferred that she was not of distinguished family. Of his two sons, Demetrios and Andronikos, it can be presumed that they survived him and inherited the property rights granted to them by an imperial Bull of 1449, made out to their father.⁶¹ He also had one or more grandsons. One of them was perhaps the John Gemistus who served as secretary to the administration of Ancona in the early sixteenth century.⁶² This man addressed a Latin poem to Pope Leo X, urging him to launch a crusade in Greece.⁶³ In it he described himself as a refugee, originally from Epidaurus, and referred to 'Lacedaemon', but without connecting the area with himself personally. His link with Mistra and George Gemistos can only be conjectural.

Nothing more is known of Gemistos' family. But from his writings it

⁵⁸ Lambros, iv. 106-9.

⁵⁹ Masai (1956), 66-7; Runciman, 110.

⁶⁰ I. Mamalakis, reviewing Masai (1956) in *Δελτίον τῆς ἱστορικῆς καὶ ἐθνολογικῆς ἐταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 15 (1961), 364.

⁶¹ Zakythinos, ii. 199-200; Lambros, iv. 19-22.

⁶² Geanakoplos, 191.

⁶³ Joannes Gemistus, *Ad sanctissimum Dominum nostrum Leonem decimum Pontificem Maximum. . . Protrepticon et Pronosticon* (Ancona 1516).

is clear that he regarded marriage with approval and had no use for monastic asceticism. For the rest, his personal life took second place to philosophical activity. Nor do his philosophical writings reveal much more of his personality. One may notice only his capacity for scathing contempt and ponderous wit towards those of his juniors (such as Scholarios) who offended him; and his generosity, coupled with occasional reproachfulness, towards those (such as Bessarion) who had earned his intellectual respect. Nor is it possible even to say what he looked like, for no portrait survives.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, ii (Cambridge 1908; reprinted New York and London 1967), 61 n. 3, mistakenly said that a portrait of Gemistos was to be found in J. J. Boissard, *Icones quinquaginta virorum illustrium doctrina & eruditione praestantium*, I (Frankfurt 1597), no. xix, p. 136. The portrait is in fact of Bessarion.

III

THE TEACHING OF HUMANISM

SCHOLARIOS did not name any of the students in whom he accused Gemistos of trying to 'implant his ideas'.¹ It is difficult to fill the gap which he left. In the first part of Gemistos' teaching career, up to his journey to Italy in 1438—that is to say, over a period probably exceeding forty years—only two of his pupils are positively identifiable: Mark Eugenikos, Metropolitan of Ephesus, and Bessarion, Metropolitan of Nicaea, later a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church.² The conjunction is striking, for these two were the leaders of the two groups in the Greek delegation at the Council of Union which respectively opposed and supported the reunion with the western Church.

In neither case can their attitudes at the Council be attributed to the teaching of Gemistos, except perhaps in the sense that he encouraged both to be strong-minded and independent in their opinions. He himself was indifferent to the question of Union, and even to the fate of Christianity itself, which he thought was doomed in any case. But in the field of philosophy, as distinct from theology, it seems clear that he had a greater influence on Bessarion than on Mark Eugenikos. Mark, who was born in the early 1390s, remained strictly Orthodox and incorruptible. Bessarion, who was about ten years younger, proved more flexible, as was evident from the letters which he wrote on the death of his old teacher.

Bessarion was born at Trebizond, under the independent rule of the Komnenoi, in early 1402. He was therefore too young, unlike Mark Eugenikos, to have studied under Gemistos before the latter's final departure from Constantinople. In fact he had three tutors before Gemistos: the Metropolitan Dositheos of Trebizond, the Metropolitan Ignatios (John Chortasmenos) of Selymbria, and George Chrysokokkes, a distinguished doctor, astronomer, and geographer. It was Chortasmenos who advised him to complete his education under Gemistos at Mistra, which indicates that Gemistos was not wholly discredited in the eyes of the Church.³ With Gemistos, Bessarion went through the liberal arts curriculum again, with a special emphasis on

¹ Scholarios, iv. 153. 11.

² Syropoulos, v. 30.

³ Mohler, iii. 406.

mathematics. The funeral oration on his death in 1472 by Niccolò Capranica, the bishop of Fermo, mentioned that mathematics included the study of Ptolemy—that is to say, of astronomy and geography.⁴ But it probably also included much more.

For a Platonist, mathematics was related both to philosophy and to physics, including also cosmology and astrology. The curious language of Charitonimos in his funeral oration on Gemistos, vague as it was, made this at least clear.⁵ Mathematics would include Pythagorean number-mysticism, Plato's cosmological geometry, and the Neoplatonic arithmetic which connected the material world with the world of Plato's Forms. Possibly it also included astrology in the case of Gemistos' teaching, for Charitonimos claimed that he was 'superlative and not inferior to Calchas in forecasting and announcing events which had not yet happened'.⁶

How much of these doctrines Bessarion took to heart, it is impossible to say. His mind had a strongly practical bent; he was interested in western technology and in calendar reform; he believed in harmonizing different disciplines and reconciling divergent points of view. But he also had a mystical streak. His letter to Gemistos' sons on their father's death showed that he was proficient in Neoplatonic vocabulary.⁷ His letter to Secundinus on the same occasion, without being so explicit, emphasized the broad scope of his mathematical studies under Gemistos, and also hinted that they touched on what Gemistos would have called Platonic theology.⁸

Such were Gemistos' two known pupils in his early career, before 1438. To extend the list is not easy. It has been suggested that Manuel Chrysoloras, the first Greek to teach at Florence in 1397, had been a pupil of Gemistos, but this is quite implausible since he was older than Gemistos by at least a decade and died in 1415. There are in fact no further names to be added to the list of known pupils until the 1440s, and then only Laonikos Chalkokondyles, the historian, is a certainty.⁹

It is arguable, however, that anyone of education and intellectual tastes who spent any length of time at Mistra during Gemistos' life there could not have remained uninfluenced by his personality. The same is no doubt true of those who were in correspondence with him, or who encountered his ideas at second hand, without necessarily ever

⁴ Ibid. 407.

⁶ Ibid. 808 D.

⁹ Bodnar, 58.

⁵ PG 160, 807 C-8 B. See pp. 8-9 above.

⁷ Mohler, iii. 468-9.

⁸ Ibid. 470.

visiting Mistra or meeting him. It is therefore worthwhile to adopt a more elastic definition of the relation of teacher and pupil in order to include disciples and adherents who may never in the formal sense have studied under him. Even so, the yield is not large or striking.

The most interesting example is Demetrios Raoul Kabakes, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Gemistos, if not a pupil. Kabakes was a Peloponnesian aristocrat of Norman descent, as his middle name (Hellenized as Rhalles) clearly indicates.¹⁰ His family had been prominent in the Peloponnese since the thirteenth century, originally at Monemvasia and later at Mistra. Since he died in 1487 at the age of 90, according to a Latin epigram by his son Manuel (Manilius),¹¹ he was born in the last years of the fourteenth century and could have come into contact with Gemistos as early as the 1420s.

Apart from his esoteric studies, Kabakes occupied himself as a copyist of manuscripts, though he never mastered the spelling of his own language.¹² The earliest manuscript known to have been his work is dated 1445.¹³ His later years, after he escaped to Italy, were devoted to salvaging the remnants of Gemistos' work. Since he was at one time also in friendly correspondence with two of Gemistos' later critics, Matthew Kamariotes¹⁴ and George Scholarios (the latter of whom addressed him as 'my master and brother'),¹⁵ there was evidently no suspicion against him during Gemistos' lifetime. But in fact he followed Gemistos the whole way into outright paganism.

There is much evidence of his devotion to Gemistos. He recorded a conversation with Bessarion, after his master's death, in which Bessarion told him that there had been no wiser man in Greece since Plotinus. In his manuscript note of the conversation, Kabakes added in the margin, using Gemistos' chosen pseudonym and his own peculiar spelling: *Πλάτων· Πλοτίνοσ· Πλήθων*.¹⁶ Under Gemistos' influence, he admired Julian the Apostate and shared his passionate love of the sun. A curious note survives, in Kabakes' handwriting, on a manuscript of Julian's *Address to King Helios*.¹⁷ In it he expressed regret that his master had 'missed' or 'overlooked' Julian's work, because 'it has

¹⁰ S. Fassoulakis, *The Byzantine Family of Raoul-Ral(l)es* (Athens 1973), 1-4, 83-4.

¹¹ Id., "Ἡ οἰκογένεια Καβάκη", *Report of 1st Laconian Conference, October 1977* (Athens 1980), 39-48. See also Masai (1956), 131 n. 1.

¹² Ibid. 385-6.

¹³ Fassoulakis, *op. cit.* (1973), 84.

¹⁴ Legrand (1892), 311-12.

¹⁵ Ibid. 313-14; Scholarios, iv. 457-8.

¹⁶ Masai (1956), 386.

¹⁷ J. Bidez, *La Tradition manuscrite et les éditions des discours de l'empereur Julien* (Ghent and Paris 1929), 76-9; and review of above by H. Grégoire in *Byzantion*, 5 (1929), 733-4.

merit and value, just as you are similarly meritorious, and particularly so in mathematics'. The somewhat clumsy phrase shows that Kabakes was closely acquainted with Gemistos' teaching. It also emphasizes the importance of mathematics in his Neoplatonism.

Kabakes admitted that he was a sun-worshipper, and stated that Gemistos was also. He said that his own love of the sun had been conceived before he was 17 years of age, and still persisted at the age of 74.¹⁸ None of this, evidently, was known to Scholarios when he wrote his extant letter to Kabakes about 1450. Apart from the respectful tone of Scholarios' letter towards Kabakes, it also contained praise of Gemistos for his refutation of what he called 'that nonsense in support of the Latins'.¹⁹ The reference is to a pro-Catholic treatise by John Argyropoulos, which led Gemistos to write his *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*, probably between 1448 and 1450.²⁰ These indications show that Kabakes was a respected figure in intellectual circles around the middle of the century, and that there were no suspicions of his orthodoxy.

Another contemporary figure in the Peloponnese may be set alongside him, whose fate was very different. This was a certain Juvenal (Iouvenalios), who was executed as a heretic in or about 1451.²¹ He claimed to be an illegitimate son of the Emperor Andronikos IV, who died in 1385. Whether that was true or not, his age would make him the oldest known associate of Gemistos, but the nature of their association is obscure. Evidence of it rests entirely on the insinuations of Scholarios in a letter written to a Peloponnesian official at the very end of Gemistos' life.²² Scholarios did not name Gemistos in this letter, but he contrived to suggest by his allusive phraseology that Gemistos was among 'those who had taught' Juvenal.²³ The phrase need not necessarily imply a formal relationship of teacher and pupil, but it was intended to link Gemistos with Juvenal's heresies. It is improbable, however, that Juvenal was a pupil of Gemistos in the formal sense, or that there was any association between them in Gemistos' early days at Mistra. There is in fact no positive evidence that the two men ever met.

The two cases of Kabakes and Juvenal show that Gemistos' doctrines had some appeal to the upper classes in the Peloponnese. Kabakes was indubitably an aristocrat, and Juvenal must have so regarded himself in the light of his claim to imperial parentage. But no

¹⁸ Bidez, *op. cit.* 78.

¹⁹ Scholarios, iv. 458. 1.

²⁰ Masai (1956), 389-92.

²¹ Scholarios, iv. 481-2.

²² *Ibid.* 476-89.

²³ *Ibid.* 479. 20; see pp. 271-2 below.

other members of the local nobility are known by name to have been among Gemistos' adherents. The Peloponnesian aristocracy was numerous, and its members must have had some acquaintance with the most celebrated intellectual at Mistra. That any of them were actually his pupils can only rest on conjecture.²⁴

Only a minority of them became known for intellectual interests of their own. Some bore great names indicating descent from imperial families: Laskaris, Cantacuzene, Palaiologos. Some pursued respectable careers as senior officials: administrators, ambassadors, judges. Many more were powerful and rebellious land-owners, who resented paying taxes for the defence of the Despotate. A few were rich men of whom little is known: John Phrangopoulos, who rebuilt the church of Pantanassa in Gemistos' lifetime; Manuel Laskaris Katzikes, whose portrait in the same church is the only secular painting to survive at Mistra.

Other more likely associates of Gemistos can be named: the bibliophile John Dokeianos; the learned Nikephoros Prinkips Cheilas; the distinguished copyist Demetrios Tribolis; and the man whom Gemistos called 'the excellent Rhaxes'.²⁵ Of these, Dokeianos copied some of Gemistos' summaries from the classical authors; Cheilas was named as a mutual friend in Bessarion's letter of condolence to Gemistos' sons on the death of their father; Tribolis copied at least one of his works, the *Address to the Emperor Manuel on Affairs in the Peloponnese*; and Rhaxes was entrusted by him with an undisclosed message to the same Emperor.²⁶ But none of them, nor any of the others, can be called a pupil of Gemistos, except on the assumption that any educated man living at Mistra in his lifetime must have sat at his feet.

There is rather more evidence at the other end of the social spectrum. The monk Gregorios was a pupil; his fellow-panegyrist of Gemistos, Hieronymos Charitonimos, wanted to be a pupil, but was rejected. George Hermonimos, who, though not identical with Charitonimos, may perhaps have been his brother, must certainly have been acquainted with Gemistos, for one of the manuscripts

²⁴ For lists of names and offices of leading personalities, see I. P. Medvedev, *Mistra* (Leningrad 1971), 50-1, 57.

²⁵ Kanellopoulos, ii. 37 (Cheilas); ii. 41 (Dokeianos); Legrand (1962), i, p. cxxxiii n. 2 (Tribolis); Lambros, iii. 309. 2 (Rhaxes). See also Runciman, 115.

²⁶ Diller (1956), 40 (Dokeianos); Mohler, iii. 469 (Cheilas); A. Oleroff, 'Démétrius Trivolis, copiste et bibliophile', *Scriptorium*, 4 (1950), 261; and see p. 101 below on Rhaxes.

which he copied was a letter from Gemistos to Bessarion in reply to the latter's questions on his *De Differentiis*.²⁷ It is interesting that Gemistos allowed several monks into his intimate circle, for his political philosophy was decidedly aristocratic and he abhorred monasticism. No doubt he made an exception for ordained monks, who would play their part in the world as priests.

Apart from Mark Eugenikos and Bessarion, the most remarkable monk who may have been a pupil of Gemistos was Isidore of Monemvasia. His is a puzzling case, because it is not even certain whether Isidore the monk was identical with the Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev, though both men came from the Peloponnese. Isidore the monk was present at Mistra in 1409 on the second anniversary of the death of the Despot Theodore I, when he shared with a certain Gazis (not Theodore) the task of reading the Emperor's funeral oration on his brother.²⁸ Gemistos appears to have been present also, though his so-called *προθεωρία* or preface to the imperial speech cannot in fact have been delivered as such, if indeed it was ever delivered at all.²⁹ At least the occasion provides a tenuous connection between Isidore and Gemistos, without implying that the former was the latter's pupil.

Isidore the monk became Metropolitan of Monemvasia in 1412, but resigned in 1430 as the result of a personal quarrel, and entered a monastery at Constantinople. In 1436 a priest of the same name became Metropolitan of Kiev and head of the Church in Russia, after a controversial election. His later career was increasingly dramatic. He attended the Council of Union in 1438-9. He supported the Union, like Bessarion, and was also rewarded with a Cardinal's hat. But on his return to Russia he was repudiated by his own clergy and by the Grand Duke of Moscow. After being imprisoned and escaping, he returned to Rome. The Pope sent him on various missions abroad, including one to Constantinople in 1452 to try to overcome Greek objections to the Union. In 1453 he took part in the final battle for the city. He was captured by the Turks, and again escaped. Until his death in 1464, he tried frequently to organize crusades for the liberation of Greece.

His courage and patriotism would have commended Isidore to

²⁷ H. Omont, *Georges Hermonyme de Sparte* (Paris 1885), 32; Sp. Lambros, "Λακεδαιμόνιοι βιβλιογράφοι", *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων*, 4 (1907), 309.

²⁸ D. A. Zakythinos, *Μανουήλ Β' ὁ Παλαιολόγος καὶ ὁ Καρδινάλιος Ἰσίδωρος ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ* (Athens 1955), 3-4. He argues that the monk and the Metropolitan of Kiev were the same man: p. 25. The opposite view is argued by V. Laurent in *Revue des études byzantines*, 17 (1955), 150-7.

²⁹ PG 156, 175-80. See pp. 88-91 below.

Gemistos. Like Gemistos and Bessarion, he had many friends among the Italian humanists. But there is no positive evidence that he was ever a pupil of Gemistos, nor would his identification with the monk Isidore constitute such evidence. On the contrary, there is one item of negative evidence against the assumption that he studied under Gemistos. He was one of the three outstanding Metropolitans at the Council of Union. Both the other two, Mark Eugenikos and Bessarion, were described as students of Gemistos by Sylvester Syropoulos, the writer of a contemporary account of the Council.³⁰ If Isidore were also Gemistos' pupil, it would be strange that Syropoulos never mentioned this fact also. At most he may be supposed to have come under Gemistos' intellectual influence.

Besides the monks—Gregorios, Mark Eugenikos, Bessarion, and Isidore—two other devout Greeks of the same generation and background felt that influence, and both resisted it. One was John Eugenikos, Mark's younger brother; the other, George Scholarios, a reluctant admirer as well as a severe critic of Gemistos.

Unlike Mark, John Eugenikos was not a monk and never studied under Gemistos. But he probably spent some time in the Peloponnese in the 1420s, and certainly returned there more than once in the decade 1440-50. He also had the opportunity of making Gemistos' acquaintance during the Council in Italy. While returning from Italy in 1439, he made a copy of one of Gemistos' essays, *On Virtues*.³¹ In a letter to Gemistos, unfortunately undated, he addressed him as 'truly the best of all men in my eyes and the wisest'.³² But such evidence of his admiration does not imply that he had any inclination towards Gemistos' esoteric doctrines, of which he probably knew nothing. In any case, like Mark, John Eugenikos was incorruptibly Orthodox.

Scholarios too was never a pupil of Gemistos, but he could not escape the fascination of his personality. There is a perpetual ambivalence in everything he wrote about Gemistos. On the one hand, he expressed admiration for Gemistos' learning and moral qualities; on the other hand, he accused him of heresy and blasphemy. He addressed Gemistos as 'best and wisest of friends',³³ but he told others that whatever skill Gemistos had in philosophy had been put 'at the service of evil prejudice',³⁴ and that he was 'utterly simple-minded and unable to distinguish truth from falsehood'.³⁵

³⁰ Syropoulos, v. 30.

³¹ Knös, 178.

³² Legrand (1892), 291-2; Lambros, i. 154-5.

³³ Scholarios, iv. 118. 30.

³⁴ Ibid. 152. 23-4.

³⁵ Ibid. 180. 27-8.

It appears from Scholarios' own account that he had begun to suspect Gemistos of heresy while still a young man himself. Their academic controversy began only after their return from the Council of Union, but Scholarios claimed to have been aware that Gemistos was engaged on a blasphemous work in the 1430s or earlier, when he himself was in the Peloponnese.³⁶ The date of Scholarios' visit to the Peloponnese is uncertain. It may have been between 1426 and 1428, when the Emperor John VIII and his brother Constantine visited Mistra, and Scholarios, already an official at court, might naturally have accompanied them.³⁷ But whenever his suspicion was first formed, it was not openly expressed until the last years of Gemistos' life, in or about 1444, and it was not confirmed by unmistakable evidence until after Gemistos' death.

Scholarios' ambivalent attitude towards Gemistos was shared by one of his own pupils, Matthew Kamariotes, who had also never been a pupil of Gemistos. At one time he was a close friend of Kabakes and a warm admirer of Gemistos, evidently having no suspicion that both men were pagans at heart. Kabakes sent him a copy of Gemistos' essay *On Virtues*—the essay which John Eugenikos copied in 1439—and Kamariotes replied in a fulsome letter. 'For a while', he wrote, 'I imagined that I could see the man before me, and a longing came over me to see him in reality, and to look upon the living virtue as it were animated in him.'³⁸ But later he formed a very different opinion of Gemistos, and attacked him violently after his death.³⁹

The account of Gemistos' circle would not be complete without reference to the imperial family. His contacts with the court did not end when the Emperor Manuel advised him to leave Constantinople. Both the Emperor and his six sons all spent part of their careers in the Peloponnese in the course of the struggle to recover territory from the Franks. Their presence drew Gemistos into a number of public affairs, but more relevant in the present context is the fact that several of them shared Gemistos' philosophical interests.

Manuel himself was a notable theologian, who was ready to debate with either Roman Catholics or Muslims. He shared with Gemistos a preference for Plato over Aristotle: his letters frequently cite Plato by name, but rarely Aristotle.⁴⁰ Two of his sons, John and Constantine (each of whom succeeded to the throne), also shared Gemistos' taste for philosophy. John corresponded with Gemistos on some recondite

³⁶ Ibid. 155. 31.

³⁷ Zisis, 113.

³⁸ Legrand (1892), 312.

³⁹ See p. 362 below.

⁴⁰ Dennis, 242-3.

points in his *De Differentiis* and other writings. Constantine became indirectly involved in the controversy between Gemistos and Scholarios, each of whom sent him their works and expressed respect for his opinion.

The remaining brothers all certainly knew Gemistos at Mistra, but had no comparable interest in philosophy. Theodore was the recipient, perhaps unwillingly, of Gemistos' theories on politics rather than philosophy. Demetrios and his wife, Theodora Asenina, had the distinction of being among the very few who had the opportunity of reading the complete text of Gemistos' last work, the *Book of Laws*. Theodora at least had sufficient comprehension to be horrified by it. None of the family showed the least trace of being corrupted by his heresies.

All those so far named could have known Gemistos, or at least been aware of him, before the Council of Union in 1438-9. After his return to Mistra in early 1440 a new generation began to cross his path. These were all too young to have been pupils in his earlier career. Most of them will be introduced more fully in their chronological context in later chapters. At this point it is only necessary to list their names.

A curious fact should first be noticed about them. The only one who can be identified with certainty as a pupil in the formal sense showed no evidence of being affected by Gemistos' esoteric doctrines. This was Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who was studying at Mistra in 1447, and later became a distinguished historian. In all the other cases which show evidence of interest in Gemistos' paganism, there is no positive evidence that they were actually his pupils. Men sought his acquaintance because they were already interested in Neoplatonism, rather than being corrupted by his teaching.

The most important of the new generation was John Argyropoulos, who was born about 1415. He attended the Council of Union as a young man, and later played an important role in promoting Greek studies at Florence and elsewhere in Italy. He was by no means an uncritical follower of Gemistos in philosophical debate. It was he who wrote the pro-Unionist treatise which Gemistos attacked with Scholarios' approval.⁴¹ Argyropoulos was also an Aristotelian rather than a Platonist, though he was less dogmatic than Scholarios. One of his later pupils, Donato Acciaiuoli (of the family which had ruled as Dukes of Athens), wrote that Argyropoulos 'diligently expounded the

⁴¹ Masai (1956), 389-92; Scholarios, iv. 458. 1.

theories of Plato, and those secrets of his and his esoteric doctrine (*reconditam disciplinam*).⁴² Here is one point on which he saw eye to eye with Gemistos.

Although there is no positive evidence that he was ever at Mistra, he presumably formed a degree of intimacy with Gemistos in Italy. The presumption is strengthened by the approach made to both men by Michael Apostoles, an ardent young Platonist born about 1422. He wrote to Gemistos at the very end of his life asking him 'to enrol me in the chorus of your students'. He also wrote twice to Argyropoulos, asking him to use his influence with Gemistos in support of his application.⁴³ Whether or not he was successful is unknown: probably not, or he would have boasted of it in his later career, which he devoted to acrimonious controversy in support of Plato and Plethon.

Another who felt Gemistos' influence without, so far as is known, ever studying under him at Mistra, was Nicholas Secundinus. Like Argyropoulos, he must have come to know Gemistos at the Council of Union, where he served as an interpreter.⁴⁴ He supported Gemistos in his criticisms of Aristotle, who had, he said, attacked Plato 'not from love of truth but from desire for glory'.⁴⁵ His special relationship with Gemistos was recognized by Bessarion when he sent to Secundinus a copy of his letter of condolence to Gemistos' sons on their father's death. But he was not much of a philosopher, nor was he a fanatical partisan of Gemistos' Platonism, like Apostoles. When Apostoles wrote a violent attack on the Aristotelians, in Italy after Gemistos' death, Secundinus joined his friend Andronikos Kallistos and Bessarion in expressing disapproval of it.⁴⁶

The dispute between Platonists and Aristotelians in Italy was conducted almost entirely between expatriate Greeks. No purpose would be served by introducing Gemistos' Italian acquaintances and admirers at this point, since none of them took part in that dispute and none was ever formally his pupil. A few, who shared his philosophical interests, did so before they met him. Others did so without meeting him at all. But there was no secret society of Neoplatonists in Italy, because there was no need of secrecy.

What Gemistos left behind him in Greece was more ambiguous.

⁴² A. Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica di Firenze* (Florence 1902), 469-70; G. Cammelli, *Giovanni Argiropulo* (Florence 1941), 112-15.

⁴³ Masai (1956), 312-14; Alexandre, 370-5.

⁴⁴ P. D. Mastrodimitris, *Νικόλαος Σεκουνδινός* (Athens 1970), 39-40.

⁴⁵ Mastrodimitris, *op. cit.* 44 n. 4.

⁴⁶ PG 161, 691-5 n. 1.

The survey of his known circle suggests that Scholarios was mistaken in believing that he deliberately corrupted his pupils. Those who studied under him *in statu pupillari* received much the same education as under any other tutor. He had indeed an esoteric doctrine, and he communicated it; but only to those who approached him with that in view—in the words of the monk Gregorios, ‘those who chose’⁴⁷—being already attracted by Neoplatonism. What Scholarios called ‘corruption’ was the precondition, not the consequence, of his teaching. If there was a secret ‘brotherhood’ (*φαιρία*)⁴⁸ to which Juvenal belonged, Gemistos was only on the periphery of it.

The teaching of heresy at Mistra therefore probably died with Gemistos. Evidence for this conclusion can be found in the case of John Moschos, who was regarded as his successor in the teaching of the humanities at Mistra.⁴⁹ He attracted many students, both Greek and Italian, in the generation after Gemistos’ death. But no one ever suggested that he continued the teaching of Gemistos’ heretical doctrines, nor even that he knew anything of them.

With the exception of Mark Eugenikos, who most probably died in 1444, and Juvenal, who was executed in or about 1451, all those who have been identified as coming under Gemistos’ influence outlived him, most of them by many years. It seems that none of them, again with the exception of Mark Eugenikos, can have been among his first generation of pupils at Constantinople. Juvenal, by virtue of his age, might have been another exception, but it is highly improbable that he was actually a pupil of Gemistos in the formal sense at all, let alone at such an early date. So almost no indications can be found through his pupils to define the subversive nature of his early teaching, which led to his enforced departure from Constantinople.

There is in fact no unimpeachable source on that subject. The accusations of Scholarios, plausible though they may be, were compiled half a century later, on the basis of hearsay. Neither he nor George Trapezuntius nor any other antagonist claimed to have any first-hand knowledge of Gemistos’ doctrines earlier than the late 1420s or later still. The occasionally illuminating phrases of Bessarion or the monk Gregorios reflect Gemistos’ philosophy only in his last years. The only authentic, first-hand source lies in what Gemistos himself wrote.

⁴⁷ PG 160, 814 C.

⁴⁸ Scholarios, iv. 477. 2.

⁴⁹ Masai (1956), 363.

He used to suggest that, imitating Plato, he did not formulate his most important doctrines in writing, but communicated them orally. That must be taken, however, to mean that he did not put them in writing for publication. It is difficult to believe that such works as the *Book of Laws* did not embody his esoteric doctrine in full, or that there was more which he withheld. If it is assumed that his esoteric teaching did not vary substantially between his earlier and later career, his major philosophical works, all of which belong to his last years, could be taken as evidence of his teaching throughout. That was certainly Scholarios' assumption.

Only that assumption makes it possible to find traces of the esoteric teaching of his early years through his writings. For most of those that survive from the period before his visit to Italy are *pièces d'occasion*—funeral orations, advisory addresses, and so on—whose philosophical content is limited almost entirely to moral and political themes, with few glimpses of metaphysics. It is not altogether surprising that Scholarios should have claimed that Gemistos wrote no serious work of philosophy before *De Differentiis* in 1439.⁵⁰

The reason was, evidently, that Gemistos followed Plato in distrusting the written word as the means of communicating the most important doctrines. Plato had explained his preference for oral teaching in his seventh Letter.⁵¹ (Whether the letter is genuine or not is immaterial, since Gemistos certainly accepted it.) In his defence of Plato for not having composed systematic treatises like Aristotle, Gemistos wrote that 'Plato, like the Pythagoreans before him, preferred not to write on such subjects but to communicate them orally to his students, because they would be wiser if they had the sciences in their souls rather than in books.'⁵² He added that, owing to the unavoidable discontinuity of philosophical studies, 'it is useful to make a kind of note for the benefit of those not engaged in continuous study'. This was no doubt his own practice. Clues to his early teaching are therefore likely to be found chiefly in lecture-notes.

The most interesting examples of what are probably early lecture-notes derive from Gemistos' interest in Zoroaster. These are the subject of the next chapter. Other examples that can be dated to his early career are scanty. The excerpts and summaries from the classics are hardly relevant, since whatever their date and purpose, they include no original metaphysics. Another example which can be excluded is the essay *On Virtues*, partly because it is a straightforward

⁵⁰ Scholarios, iv. 3. 19.

⁵¹ *Epistles*, vii. 341 B-D.

⁵² PG 160, 983 D.

work of ethical analysis and partly because it probably belongs to the time of Gemistos' visit to Italy. A likelier example, though it cannot be precisely dated, is a slight manuscript under the title *On Fortune*, discovered by Professor Masai.⁵³

This work survives only in the form of notes in the handwriting of Janus Lascaris, one of the most distinguished Greeks of the diaspora. He cannot have heard the lecture delivered by Gemistos, since he was born only in 1445. Either he inherited and copied the notes of an earlier student, or he heard the lecture reconstituted by another follower of Gemistos, or he had Gemistos' own notes before him to copy. In any case there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the notes as an expression of Gemistos' own teaching. The following summary is based on Masai's account.

The notes begin by accepting, in a manner very characteristic of Gemistos, the validity of the 'common ideas' of mankind. Fortune or Chance exists because all reasonable men recognize its existence. It is among the causes of events. The task of the philosopher is to analyse its nature, not to dissolve its existence. The natural starting-point is ordinary language. The term is applied only to events supervening upon the exercise of the will, not to abnormalities in natural phenomena. For example, the birth of a monster is not attributed to chance. But if a peasant digging his field turns up a treasure, that is called good fortune; if he hits a snake, which bites him, that is bad fortune. So fortune, good or bad, is an aspect of chance in human affairs. It is part of the order of efficient causation, but not part of the normal exercise of causation. If the peasant were consciously seeking treasure, his discovery of it would not be attributed to chance.

In speaking of the operation of chance, Gemistos used the word *αὐτόματος*, which means both 'spontaneous' and 'accidental'. He derived it from the Greek words meaning 'self' (*αὐτός*) and 'without purpose' (*μάτην*). He repeated this derivation, correctly attributing it to Aristotle,⁵⁴ in his controversy with Scholarios.⁵⁵ This is among the indications that he was not fundamentally hostile to Aristotle, whom he did not attack, at least in writing, at any time before his visit to Italy in 1438. But unlike Aristotle he did not regard chance as completely nullifying the effect of efficient causation. He was attributing the chance event to a conjunction of two causal series, each of them fixed and determined in itself; one acting with a view to a particular end and one accidentally acting at variance with it. The conjunction was due to

⁵³ Masai (1956), 193-5.

⁵⁴ *Physics*, ii. 197^b29-30.

⁵⁵ PG 160, 1010 B.

divine providence, for which (he said) there was no room in the Aristotelian system.

Although Gemistos always sought to preserve the doctrine of divine providence, his use of the word *αὐτόματος* in the lecture *On Fortune* would not have escaped Scholarios' suspicion, for to him this implied determinism. The derivative *αὐτοματισταί* was Scholarios' word for determinists, whom he identified with atheists, as in the title of a work which he wrote as a monk after his resignation from the Patriarchate: *On the Triune God and Creator of all things, and against Atheists or Determinists, and against Polytheists*.⁵⁶ This work was in part an attack on Gemistos, though without naming him.⁵⁷

It was evident to Scholarios that Gemistos successfully exercised a certain degree of duplicity in disguising his heterodoxy. 'Some say that he is pious in his views on the deity', Scholarios wrote in a letter to Mark Eugenikos; and he himself did not expressly deny it.⁵⁸ Piety was certainly ascribed to Gemistos by his adherents, such as Charitonimos⁵⁹ and Apostoles,⁶⁰ though the word would not have meant the same to them as to Scholarios. There is at least one small work, probably belonging to the early part of his teaching career, whose ambiguity could have confirmed Scholarios' suspicions. It is known as the *Prayer to the One God*.⁶¹

The prayer runs as follows:

O God, creator of all, supreme above all, most excellent, greatest king of all, most high, compassionate to all, alone most generous to man and most kind, how unsearchable and unfathomable and ineffable is the ocean of thy goodness, thy boundless mercy towards man! So I beseech thee, heavenly king, who art very goodness, very truth, the essence of being, the life of all things, grant me that this day, and indeed this month and year at which I stand, be without scandal, without sickness, without sin, healthy, wholly acceptable; and grant me that I may spend the rest of my life well as thou wouldst wish. Bestir me to the remembrance and performance of what I ought, and to the avoidance of what I ought not, so that I continue in thy favour, both in learning, and in word and deed, and in the whole conduct of life, singing of thee, raising hymns to thee, thanking and glorifying thee as our sole true master! O God, the cause of all good things, consent that I may progress to thy divine knowledge and to the exercise of good counsel and good works in this life!

This has been assumed to be an early work because it was 'still Christian and Orthodox'.⁶² The assumption may be justified, but the

⁵⁶ Scholarios, iv. 172-89.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 180. 13 ff.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 117. 10.

⁵⁹ PG 160, 809 A.

⁶⁰ Alexandre, 373-4.

⁶¹ Id. 273-4.

⁶² Id. p. vii n. 3.

prayer would be better described as theistically neutral, because it could equally well have been used by any monotheistic religion. The God addressed is nowhere defined as Christian: he could have been Yahweh or Allah or Zeus or the Sun. Gemistos was always a monotheist at heart, even after he abandoned Christianity: and he would have strongly rebutted Scholarios' charges of atheism or polytheism. So it is possible to imagine his prayer being used as an introduction to the day's work by his students, but given a different interpretation in the minds of different students.

Scholarios' suspicions of Gemistos' duplicity would have been reinforced by another aspect of his teaching. He regarded all sciences as interrelated, and as presenting different facets of a single corpus of knowledge. In this respect he chose Plato as his model. The dialogues of Plato were not, like the treatises of Aristotle, divided under mutually exclusive titles such as Physics, Ethics, or Analytics. They generally took their names from one of the speakers, and each followed the argument wherever it led. In this respect, as in many others, Gemistos was a Platonist by temperament, Scholarios an Aristotelian. It was a theme of controversy between them.

Scholarios argued in his *Defence of Aristotle* that it was a defect in Plato, which Aristotle avoided, to mix up different disciplines, such as physics, mathematics, and theology.⁶³ In his *Reply*, Gemistos supported Plato's view that 'disciplines which are incomplete require other disciplines which are more complete to supplement them'.⁶⁴ Thus, he argued, not only did geometry need arithmetic, but also 'physics and ethics would never be complete without theology'. This principle led him to a certain looseness of expression in referring to different aspects of intellectual activity and its practitioners.

The introduction to his *Book of Laws* stated that it was to include theology, ethics, politics, liturgy, physics, logic, antiquities, and matters of health.⁶⁵ Oddly enough, the list does not include legislation, though the surviving chapters and other chapter-headings contain plenty of that as well. It is not surprising that the scholastically minded Scholarios found the whole compilation unorthodox, especially when he saw the names of Zoroaster and Muhammad as 'legislators' instead of heresiarchs. He might well conclude that Gemistos was capable of injecting heresy into the most conventional curriculum.

An example of Gemistos' habit of combining separate disciplines in his teaching can be inferred from Kabakes' note suggesting that he

⁶³ Scholarios, iv. 83.

⁶⁴ PG 160, 993 B.

⁶⁵ Alexandre, 2-5.

might have adapted Julian's *Address to King Helios* to the teaching of mathematics. Scholarios could have seen the same defect in his theological works, which often seem to have been essays in logic, metaphysics, or other branches of scholarship rather than theology as Scholarios understood it. His *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine* is a case in point, which left Scholarios uncertain whether to approve or criticize it.⁶⁶ In the *Book of Laws* some chapters whose titles imply a theological content deal with quite different topics. Modern editors take such peculiarities for granted. Alexandre, for example, found no difficulty (though mistakenly) about attaching a paragraph on the calendar to a chapter called *On the Cult of the Gods*.⁶⁷ Similarly Masai suggested that a lost essay *On the Incarnation of the Son of God* might be a work of chronology rather than Christology.⁶⁸

Scholarios was justified in regarding Gemistos as an eccentric scholar even in his lifetime, when the evidence of his heresy was not yet fully available. He saw two signs of ambiguity in Gemistos, which pointed to unorthodoxy. One was that he would not regard Christianity as the sole legitimate subject of theology. For Gemistos, Platonism and Islam were also theological subjects; and theology was subject to philosophical scrutiny, not simply a matter of revelation. The second sign was that Gemistos would not divide intellectual activity into separate, incommunicable disciplines. If Aristotle did so, that was simply an illustration of Aristotle's lack of imagination.

Although the evidence is speculative in the case of his early writings, because so few can be positively identified as such, both these characteristics may be illustrated with some plausibility in the texts described in the following chapter, since they can reasonably be regarded as lecture-notes from an early stage of his career. They are his commentaries on the so-called Chaldaean Oracles, which he chose to associate with the name of Zoroaster.⁶⁹ He was in fact the first to make this wholly fictitious attribution; and this was a sign in itself of his eccentric originality.

⁶⁶ See pp. 314-15 below.

⁶⁷ Alexandre, 58-60; Masai (1956), 395 n. 2.

⁶⁸ Masai (1954), 550.

⁶⁹ Masai (1956), 375 n. 1; Francesco Patrizzi, *Magia Philosophica* (Hamburg 1593), 6, 7, 14; Bidez-Cumont, i. 158-63.

IV

THE CHALDAEAN ORACLES

IT was Gemistos' habit to present his exotic doctrines under the nominal aegis of predecessors remote in place or time or both, particularly Zoroaster. His conception of Zoroastrianism is to be found most clearly in three works which appear in the manuscripts under the following titles, with slight variations: (1) *A Commentary on the Magian texts of Zoroaster*;¹ (2) *A Brief Explanation of the more obscure passages in these texts*;² and (3) *A Summary of the doctrines of Zoroaster and Plato*.³ None of them can be precisely dated, but the third stands apart from the other two. It has little to do with Zoroaster, who is not mentioned except in the title. It is closely related to Gemistos' last work, the *Book of Laws*, of which it is virtually an abstract; and Gemistos' autograph of the text is to be found among a group of manuscripts which can be dated to the 1440s, thus implying that it was a late work.⁴ It is therefore best considered with the *Laws*. But the *Commentary* and the *Brief Explanation* belong together in subject-matter, both dealing with the so-called Chaldaean Oracles.

Gemistos' version of the Chaldaean Oracles consisted of sixty Greek hexameters. Some were only half-lines, and many were defective in prosody. A larger collection had been used by Michael Psellos in the eleventh century.⁵ Still more were collected by Francesco Patrizzi, and published at Venice in 1591.⁶ About another hundred lines have been identified since then.⁷ The best and most complete modern edition of the Oracles includes 226 fragments, varying in length from more than a dozen lines to single words, in some cases doubtful.⁸

Gemistos' text of the Oracles was first translated into Latin by

¹ Opsopoeus, 24-51; Alexandre, 274-81 (abridged text); Bidez-Cumont, ii. 253 (extract).

² Kieszkowski, 161-3.

³ Alexandre, 262-9; PG 160, 973-4.

⁴ Diller (1956), 38-9.

⁵ Opsopoeus, 52-121; PG 122, 1123-50; É. Des Places, *Oracles chaldaïques avec un choix de commentaires anciens* (Paris 1971), 161-86.

⁶ A. V. Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster: the Prophet of Ancient Iran* (New York 1919), 259-73, including text edited by L. H. Gray, based on *Magia Philosophica, hoc est Francisci Patricii summi Philosophi Zoroaster et eius 320 Oracula Chaldaica* (Hamburg 1593).

⁷ Lewy, p. xvii.

⁸ É. Des Places, *op. cit.*

Marsilio Ficino, Cosimo de Medici's protégé. His version gives the same sixty lines in the same order as Gemistos; he probably also used, but did not translate, Gemistos' *Commentary*. The Greek text and the *Commentary* were first published at Paris in 1538. A new Latin translation of both, by Jacobus Marthanus, followed from the same press in 1539. Finally, in 1599, the Greek text and *Commentary* were published by J. Opsopoeus with two Latin translations, his own and Marthanus'.⁹

Modern editors and commentators have given little attention to Gemistos' work on the Oracles. Kroll (1894) dismissed his *Commentary* as derived directly from Psellos, and through him from Proclus.¹⁰ Only extracts from the *Commentary* are given by Alexandre (1858) and by Bidez and Cumont (1938). Kieszkowski (1936) printed Gemistos' text of the Oracles with Ficino's translation and Gemistos' *Brief Explanation* (for the first time) but omitted his *Commentary*, for the full text of which it is necessary to go back to Opsopoeus. Lewy (1956) included in his commentary the whole extent of the Oracles as known to him, but dealt with Gemistos' text and *Commentary* only incidentally, and not in Gemistos' order. Similarly, Des Places (1971) collected all the identifiable fragments without more than occasional reference to Gemistos' text. In the present context, it seems preferable to concentrate on the Oracles as known and understood by Gemistos rather than on the results of later scholarship.

The original composition of the Oracles is attributed to a certain Julianus the Chaldaean and his son Julianus the Theurgist, in the second century AD. There is no authentic ground for associating them with Zoroaster or the Persian Magi. Gemistos was the first to suggest this association, according to Francesco Patrizzi, no doubt in order to give the Oracles the prestige of antiquity combined with oriental wisdom. Ficino followed him in doing so.

The Chaldaeans had attracted the attention of the Greeks over many centuries. Their skill in prophecy was recognized as far back as the fifth century BC.¹¹ Later the Oracles attributed to the Chaldaeans were studied especially by the Neoplatonists—Iamblichus, Proclus, Simplicius, Damascius. Proclus, whose commentary on them survives only in fragments, said that he would be content to see all literature destroyed except Plato's *Timaeus* and the Oracles.¹²

⁹ Legrand (1962), iii. 373, 387; Opsopoeus, 16-51, 123-34.

¹⁰ W. Kroll, *De Oraculis Chaldaicis* (Breslau 1894), 2 n. 2.

¹¹ G. Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford 1925), 176-7.

¹² Marinus, *Vita Procli*, 38.

Nearer to Gemistos' own time, they had been studied by Psellos and his contemporary, the Patriarch Michael Cerularius, in the eleventh century. Both men, being Platonists, were accused of paganism. In the fourteenth century the Oracles again attracted the interest of intellectuals such as Theodore Metochites and Nikephoros Gregoras. Thus Gemistos was following a well-established, though slightly suspect, tradition of classical humanism.

His debt to his predecessors is not easy to assess. The suggestion that his *Commentary* derived wholly from Psellos, and through him from Proclus, seems exaggerated. Too little of Proclus' commentary survives to make detailed comparison possible, but Psellos' work is completely extant. It has been pointed out that all the lines in Gemistos' text are also found in Psellos' text;¹³ but this is true only subject to minor exception, and the order is totally different. A few key-words are also different, perhaps due to emendation by Gemistos. More significant are the differences in interpretation of the Oracles. It has been noted that, in contrast with Psellos, 'Gemistos never confronts the Chaldaean aberration with the teaching of the Church Fathers, as a kind of antidote.'¹⁴ It is at least reasonable to consider Gemistos' *Commentary* as an independent work.

There is no conclusive evidence to show at what stage of his life Gemistos wrote the *Commentary* or the *Brief Explanation*. Presumably they were written at different dates, since they cover much the same ground but at different length and with different degrees of detail. Whether they belong to his early or later years is disputed, but the arguments on both sides are extremely tenuous.

One argument advanced for an early date is that the comments resemble Gemistos' extracts from classical authors, and may be regarded as 'a kind of anthology' derived from Proclus.¹⁵ But the supposed resemblance is slight; and in any case many of his extracts from the classics themselves appear to have been made as late as the 1440s. Another unconvincing argument rests on the fact that certain manuscripts attribute the *Commentary* to Gemistos rather than Plethon.¹⁶ But the fact is that he was already an old man when he adopted the pseudonym of Plethon; and even after he had done so, he was still often referred to as Gemistos.

Arguments for a late date are equally inconclusive. The fact that his comments make no concession to Christianity has been supposed to

¹³ Lewy, 474-5.

¹⁴ Bidez-Cumont, ii. 252.

¹⁵ Eid. ii. 252.

¹⁶ Eid. i. 160 n. 2.

indicate that they were written after his lapse into paganism.¹⁷ But on Scholarios' evidence that could have been true throughout his adult life. It has also been remarked that all the other works in which Gemistos cited Zoroaster belong to his last period, after 1439; and with this argument has been linked the theory that Scholarios' story of Gemistos' introduction to Zoroastrianism by Elissaeus was fictitious.¹⁸ But there is no firm ground for rejecting the sole source of evidence about Gemistos' years in higher education.

Some significance should perhaps be given to the fact that the collection of Gemistos' manuscripts which Bessarion bequeathed to the Library of San Marco, and which are thought to date mainly from the 1440s, included his autograph of the *Summary of the doctrines of Zoroaster and Plato* (acknowledged to be a later work), but not the autograph of the *Commentary* or the *Brief Explanation*. This tends to confirm their separation in time. It seems reasonable in any case to treat the *Commentary* and the *Brief Explanation* as relatively early works, since they evidently reflect an interest which Gemistos owed to Elissaeus.

A translation of Gemistos' own version of the Oracles is needed first, since none exists in English; then a translation of the *Brief Explanation* follows, and finally a summary of the full-length *Commentary*. The references accompanying the text of the Oracles are to Lewy's commentary, but it should be remembered that this is based on Psellos' text. It should also be remembered that Gemistos' explanations of the Oracles are highly individual, and by no means necessarily correspond with the results of modern scholarship.

Gemistos' text reads as follows:¹⁹

Inquire after the channel of the soul: wherefrom, in what order,
Having served the body, to that order from which you flowed
You shall rise again, combining the act with the sacred word.²⁰

Incline not downwards: below the earth lies a precipice
That drags down beneath the sevenfold steps, below which
Is the throne of dread Necessity.²¹

5

Your vessel shall be occupied by the beasts of the earth.
Do not enlarge your Fate.

For nothing imperfect rolls from the sovereignty of the Father.
But the paternal intellect does not admit her volition

10

¹⁷ Eid. ii. 252.

¹⁸ Nikolaou (1971), 305, 335-7.

¹⁹ Greek text in Kieszkowski, 157-8.

²⁰ Lewy, 188-9.

²¹ Id. 293.

Until she has issued forth out of oblivion and spoken the word,
 Having taken in the memory of the holy watch-word of the Father;²²
 You must hasten towards the light and rays of the Father,
 Whence your soul was sent out, clothed in abundant intellect.²³
 The earth mourns them continually unto their children: 15
 Those who thrust out the soul and inhale are easy to loose.²⁴
 In the left flanks of the couch is the source of virtue
 Which remains wholly within and does not give away its virginity.²⁵
 The soul of mortals will somehow constrain God into herself,
 Having nothing mortal in her, she is utterly intoxicated from God. 20
 For she glories in harmony, beneath which is the mortal body.²⁶
 Since the soul is a fire, luminous through the power of the Father,
 She remains immortal and is mistress of life²⁷
 And shall be filled with many repletions from the depths of the world.
 Seek you Paradise.²⁸ 25
 Do not pollute the spirit, do not depress the surface.
 Even the image has its portion in the circumsplendent place.
 Do not leave behind the dung of matter for the precipice.²⁹
 Do not draw it forth, that it may not suffer in going out.
 By extending the fiery intellect 30
 To the act of piety, you shall also save the liquescent body.
 Then from the depths of the earth leap forth the dogs of the underworld
 Showing no true sign to mortal man.
 Nature gives proof that there exist pure daemons
 And that the fruits even of evil matter are worthy and good. 35
 The penalties are constrainers of men.
 Let the immortal depth of the soul be leader. Spread wide
 All eyes upwards.³⁰
 O man, the contrivance of most daring Nature!
 If you say this to me often, you will see the word for ever; 40
 For then the curved mass of heaven is not visible.³¹
 The stars do not shine, the light of the moon is veiled,
 The earth stands not firm. All things appear as lightning.
 Do not call upon the self-revealed image of Nature.
 Draw tight from all sides the reins of the fire with an untouched soul.³² 45
 When you behold the most holy fire without form
 Flashing with quivering flames through the recesses of the whole world,
 Then hearken to the voice of the fire.³³
 The paternal intellect has sown symbols in men's souls.³⁴

²² Lewy, p. 190.²³ Id. 171.²⁴ Id. 205.²⁵ Id. 88.²⁶ Id. 198.²⁷ Id. 86.²⁸ Id. 220-1.²⁹ Id. 213.³⁰ Id. 169.³¹ Id. 242.³² Id. 171.³³ Id. 244.³⁴ Id. 191.

Learn what is intelligible, for it exists outside the intellect. 50
 There is indeed something intelligible, which you must understand by the
 flower of the intellect.³⁵

All things descend from one fire.³⁶
 For the Father perfected everything and committed it
 To the second intellect, which the races of men call the first.³⁷
 Spells are thought by the Father and think themselves. 55
 They are moved by voiceless wills to have understanding.³⁸
 Lo! how the world has inflexible intellectual upholders!³⁹
 The Father has snatched himself away;
 But not shutting off his own fire in his intellectual power,
 The Father does not impel fear but diffuses persuasion. 60

It will be convenient to translate the *Brief Explanation* first, since it is both short and general, not a line-by-line account as is the *Commentary*. It is not an abbreviated version of the *Commentary* but an independent set of notes, no doubt intended as the basis of a lecture. It sometimes alludes to lines which are not annotated in the *Commentary*, and sometimes differs slightly in its interpretations. Since it deals mainly with the symbolic meanings of particular words and phrases, it is also sometimes useful as a preliminary to the fuller *Commentary*.

The following is the full text of the *Brief Explanation*, with line-numbers of the Oracles added in brackets:⁴⁰

These Oracles mean by fire the deity. By earth and world the mortal nature. They call the second god after the Father 'power of the Father' (l. 22), 'paternal intellect' (l. 10, l. 49), and 'second intellect' (ll. 53-4). That is, him who holds the second place in the universal sovereignty. They call 'spells' (l. 55) the intellects linked to him and the separated Forms, which they also call the 'inflexible upholders of the world' (l. 57). They call them 'spells' because of the erotic attachment of things in this world to themselves which the name of the *ἔνυξ* (spell) indicates.⁴¹ These Oracles also call the ritual, 'act' (l. 3) and 'act of piety' (l. 31). And the word of faith in God, 'sacred word' (l. 3). When they say, 'In the left flanks of the couch is the source of virtue' (l. 17), they mean the power of virtue belonging to the left part of our soul, which they describe as insensible through virginity. Whereas the soul's activity, on the

³⁵ Id. 167-8.

³⁶ Id. 81.

³⁷ Id. 320.

³⁸ Id. 132-4.

³⁹ Id. 135.

⁴⁰ Kieszkowski, 161-3.

⁴¹ The *ἔνυξ* (which has come into English as 'jinx') was a bird (the wryneck) which in classical times was used by witches, attached to a revolving wheel, as a magic charm to control men's hearts, as in Theocritus, *Idylls*, 2. 17. Hence it was much used to recall faithless lovers, and the word eventually became equivalent to (1) a charm or spell, and (2) a passionate yearning.

one hand belonging to the right part and on the other hand being extrusible, is not insensible. When they say that our soul 'glories in harmony' (l. 21), they mean the concord and union of the whole, coinciding in our soul with its communion with a mortal body, the soul being immortal, and all things, immortal and mortal, being in communion with each other. When they call the spirit of our soul and its attendant vehicle a 'surface' (l. 26), they do not mean really a surface, for it is a body, but by 'surface' they signify its extreme tenuity. They also call it—or rather, the motion of the soul in its vehicle—an 'image' (l. 27) and a sign for the soul to the 'circumspicuous place' (l. 27), which they also call 'Paradise' (l. 25). By the 'dung of matter' (l. 28) they mean this mortal body. They bid us not to neglect it, though perishable, but to preserve it so far as possible. By the 'dogs of the underworld' (l. 32) they mean certain insubstantial visions arising from the passions of our mortal nature, which are seen during rituals by those who have not yet rightly ordered their soul, signifying nothing true. When they call matter evil, they do not mean purely evil, for they would not say that things 'worthy and good' (l. 35) spring from it, but they mean it is evil in comparison with the whole of formal being, by reason of its being last in the whole of essential nature. And when they say, 'The Father has snatched himself away' (l. 58), they indicate the exclusiveness of his divinity and his detachment from the number of all the other gods.

In the *Commentary*, unlike the *Brief Explanation*, Gemistos went through the Oracles line by line, in the order in which they appeared in his text.⁴² But he did not offer comments on every line, and he added a substantial paragraph at each end of his comments, designed to link the Oracles more firmly with Zoroaster. This association was quite arbitrary, involving the attribution to Zoroaster of doctrines which he never held, such as the transmigration of souls. But it deserves notice as providing clues to Gemistos' own thought, if not to the original meaning of the Oracles.

The *Commentary* begins with a general account of the Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation, which it ascribes to 'the Magi following Zoroaster'. There are said to be different places in the other world, some of which are light, some dark, some intermediate, for the soul to go to between descents into the human form. If the soul has been good on earth, it returns to a light place; if not, to a darker place according to the degree of its shortcomings on earth.⁴³

There follow a number of definitions, most of which coincide with those given in the *Brief Explanation*. One addition is that 'your vessel'

⁴² Opsopoeus, 24-51; Alexandre, 274-81.

⁴³ Opsopoeus, 24-5; Alexandre, 274-5.

(l. 7) is explained as 'your body', which contains the soul. It should be noted that in the following passages, where the phrases in inverted commas do not correspond with the text of the Oracles, the discrepancies reflect differences in the original Greek: in other words, Gemistos' notes do not invariably follow the exact text of the Oracles.

The notion of Fate is introduced by the phrase about the 'sevenfold steps' (l. 5). This is said to mean Fate dependent on the seven planets. The moral follows: 'Do not try to achieve what is beyond your Fate' (l. 8). Nothing imperfect comes from the paternal sovereignty of God (l. 9). He is referred to throughout as the Father, but he is not the only god. References to the 'power of the Father' and the 'paternal intellect' mean the second god. This second god is the immediate creator of the human soul, but he 'does not allow the will of the soul to enter until it has shaken off the forgetfulness which it has suffered through connection with the human body' (l. 10).⁴⁴

The 'light and rays of the Father' (l. 13) mean the place from which the soul descends to earth. This is also called Paradise (l. 25). It is the soul's duty to hasten back to that light. Those who do not do so will suffer for their sins, and so will their children (l. 15). It is the task of reason to divert the soul from iniquity and so release it from oblivion (l. 16). There follows the puzzling line on the 'source of virtue', which is located on 'the left flanks of the couch' (l. 17).⁴⁵ The meaning, according to Gemistos, is that virtue resides in the left side of the soul, which is passive and virgin; the right side is active and by implication corruptible; but the potentiality for virtue cannot be expelled, though it may be dormant.⁴⁶

The human soul clings to God, being itself immortal and 'intoxicated with divinity' (l. 20). Although united with a mortal body, it rejoices in the union and is not ashamed of it. This union reflects the harmony of the universe. The soul is created by the 'power' or the 'intellectual power' or the 'intellect of the Father'—that is to say, by the second god who has 'proceeded from the supreme God' (l. 22). The soul is endowed by him with intelligence; it is divine and immortal, and cannot be taken away from us; 'and we are masters of what cannot be taken away from us'. Thus a measure of free will is introduced. The soul also has many places in the universe, to which it is assigned

⁴⁴ Opsopoeus, 26-9.

⁴⁵ Psellos' text read *Ἐκάτης* (the witch-goddess Hecate) in place of *κοίτης* (couch): PG 122, 1136 A.

⁴⁶ Opsopoeus, 28-31.

according to its past life. Its 'place of splendour' is called Paradise (l. 25).⁴⁷

Commenting on the line which calls on man not to 'depress the surface' (l. 26), Gemistos touches on the question of the connection between an immaterial spirit and a material body. The Pythagoreans and Platonists, he says, hold that the soul is neither wholly separate from the body nor wholly inseparable: it is potentially separable but actually inseparable. He also says that they postulate three kinds of Forms (*εἶδη*): one wholly separate from matter, which consists of the supracelestial minds; one dependent on matter and not self-subsistent, which is dissolved with the matter to which it is attached, and is therefore wholly irrational; and one between the two, which is the rational soul. The last differs from the supracelestial minds in being always linked with matter, and from the irrational Form in being independent of matter but having matter dependent on it.⁴⁸

The soul has its own essence; it is indivisible; it produces effects similar to those of the supracelestial minds; it is capable of knowledge and thought about reality, up to that of the supreme God; and it is indestructible. This soul uses a heavenly body as its vehicle, and that vehicle itself possesses soul of an irrational kind (called by philosophers the 'image' of the rational soul), but equipped with imagination and sensation. Through the power of imagination the rational is permanently united with such a body, and through such a body the human soul is united with the mortal body. The souls of daemons have superior, immortal vehicles, and the souls of stars have still more superior vehicles. 'These are the theories of the soul which appear to have been held from an even earlier date by the Magi following Zoroaster.'⁴⁹

The 'image' of the soul (l. 27) means the bare irrational part of it, which is joined to the rational part and depends on it as a vehicle. The 'dung of matter' (l. 28) is the mortal body, which must be cared for and not neglected while we live, so that it remains so far as possible healthy, pure, and in harmony with the soul. It follows that one must not 'make away with the soul from the body' (l. 29), for this would mean the soul making away with itself, contrary to the laws of nature.⁵⁰

The divine intellect should be extended in the exercise of piety—that is, in divine worship—since this will preserve the mortal body also and make it more healthy (l. 30). In such divine worship, the evocation

⁴⁷ Opsopoeus, 30-5.

⁴⁸ Id. 34-7; Alexandre, 276-7.

⁴⁹ Opsopoeus, 36-9; Alexandre, 278.

⁵⁰ Opsopoeus, 38-41.

of 'doglike visions' or 'dogs of the underworld' (l. 32) or other animal phantasms at religious ceremonies, is condemned, for these are symbols of the terrestrial and mortal body and of irrational passions.⁵¹

The notes on the next few lines broach the problem of good and evil, and introduce the conception of daemons as intermediate beings between God and man. It is said that 'nature, or natural reason, persuades the sacred daemons, and in a word all that proceeds from the God who is good in himself, to be beneficent' (l. 34). Even the 'fruits of evil matter' belong in this category. The poet (of the Oracles) does not mean that matter is essentially evil, 'for how could matter be evil when its fruits are beneficent and good?' It is evil only in the sense that it has been introduced lately among the essential beings, so that it has the lowest share of goodness. What is meant by 'evil' is simply paucity of goodness.⁵²

If even the fruits of evil matter are good, how much more so must be the daemons, since they possess rational nature unmixed with mortal nature. Even their terrible aspect is beneficent. 'Penalties' (l. 36) are the avenging daemons who restrain men and divert them from evil, compelling them towards virtue.

The phrase about the leadership of 'the immortal depth of the soul' and the spreading of 'all eyes upwards' (ll. 37-8) is interpreted as meaning simply the extension of man's capacity for knowledge. Man is called the 'contrivance of all-prevailing nature' because of his capacity for daring ventures (l. 39). In this case Gemistos departs slightly from the text, which calls nature, not man, 'most daring'.⁵³

The next lines deal with theology and liturgy. If you speak often with God, you will see the word (*λεκτόν*)⁵⁴ itself—that is, God whom you call upon; for you will see nothing but lightning, that is, the 'fire of the universe' (ll. 40-3). Do not seek to see the image of nature (that is, of God), for it is not to be seen by the eye. What men see in religious rituals, such as fire and lightning, are only symbols, not the nature of God (l. 44). Draw towards yourself in simplicity and purity the 'reins of the fire' (l. 45), which you see in religious rituals. When you see the 'formless fire of God' (l. 46) leaping about everywhere, hear its voice, 'which carries the truest foreknowledge'.⁵⁵

The nature of knowledge is the next theme. The 'intellect of the Father' (l. 49)—that is, the immediate creator of the soul's being—has

⁵¹ Id. 40-1.

⁵² Id. 40-3.

⁵³ Id. 42-3.

⁵⁴ Psellos' text read *λέοντα* (lion) in place of *λεκτόν*: PG 122, 1133 B.

⁵⁵ Opsopoeus, 42-5.

inspired in our souls the symbols ('the images of the intelligible Forms'), from which each soul always possesses in itself the principles (*λόγους*) of existing things. 'What is intelligible' (l. 50) is actually outside your mind. Although images of intelligible things are given you through inspiration by the creator, they are in your soul only potentially. It is for you to seek knowledge of the intelligible in actuality. The intelligible, which is the 'flower of the intellect' (l. 51), or unique and best part of our intelligence, means the supreme God. All things come from 'the one fire' (l. 52), which is God.⁵⁶

The Father 'perfected everything' (l. 53): that is, he created the intelligible Forms, which he entrusted to the second god to rule over. Whatever proceeds from the second god has as its model him and the rest of intelligible being, and this has its origin from the Father. But most men mistake this second god for the first, recognizing him as the creator of the universe and unaware of any other above him. The 'mental spells' (l. 55) are the intelligible Forms, 'conceived by the Father and themselves conceiving and moved towards conceptions by unspoken and voiceless wills'. The latter phrase means 'unmoved wills', for by movement is meant 'simply an intellectual relationship', and 'to speak' is taken to be a kind of motion. So what is meant is 'unmoved Forms'. The supreme intelligible Forms are called the 'upholders of the universe' (l. 57), and chief among them is the second god. In calling them 'inflexible', the Oracle has in mind the immortality of the universe.⁵⁷

The concluding lines are concerned with the Father himself. He has 'snatched himself away' (l. 58): that is, he has separated himself utterly from the universe. He has excluded all other intellects and gods from his divine fire. He alone owes his existence to none but himself. His divinity cannot be communicated to anyone else, though all can love him. But it is not from jealousy that he is incommunicable, only from the impossibility of communication, which would be self-contradictory since he is transcendent. He does not inspire fear (l. 60) but persuasion—that is, love. Being supremely good, he cannot be the cause of any evil thing, which might justly cause him to be feared. But he is the cause of good to all men, so that he is loved by all.⁵⁸

In a final paragraph, Gemistos claims that these doctrines are common to the Zoroastrians, the Pythagoreans, the Platonists, and many others.⁵⁹ Plutarch shows that Zoroaster's triadic division of the

⁵⁶ Opsopoeus, 44-7.

⁵⁷ Id. 46-9.

⁵⁸ Id. 48-51; Alexandre, 279.

⁵⁹ Opsopoeus, 50-1; Alexandre, 279-80.

universe is similar to Plato's.⁶⁰ He places Oromazdes (Ormuzd or Ahura Mazda), whom the Oracles call the Father, over the first division; Arimanes (Ahriman) over the last; and Mithra, whom the Oracles call the second mind, over the middle section. Oromazdes is thrice removed from the Sun ('which is called Cyrus in Persian'—an error on Gemistos' part); and Mithra is twice removed. All this is said to agree with Plato's triadic division, which states: 'Related to the King of All are all things, and for his sake they exist, and of all things good he is the cause. And related to the Second are the second things; and related to the Third the third things.'⁶¹ The first of the three divisions into which Zoroaster and Plato divide all things is eternal; the second is eternal but in time; the third is mortal. According to Plutarch, Zoroaster lived 5,000 years before the Trojan War.

So ends Gemistos' *Commentary* on the Chaldaean Oracles. At whatever date he wrote it, the influences which helped to shape it presumably went back to his years of study under Elissaeus. There are only two authorities for the sources of Gemistos' philosophy—himself and Scholarios—neither of whom places them in any chronological order in relation to the development of his ideas. He himself claimed an immemorial antiquity for his philosophy, placing Plato himself at an intermediate point in a succession stretching from the remotest past to his own day. It is thus impossible to disentangle his sources completely from each other. It will be more convenient to treat them all in a single chapter.

Before examining them, however, there are two notable absentees from the list which deserve mention: the Jewish Cabbala and the Graeco-Egyptian writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistos. Both display Neoplatonic features, but neither is ever mentioned by Gemistos. Their absence is interesting because both had an important influence on the subsequent generation of Neoplatonists in Italy, particularly among members of the Platonic Academy at Florence, which owed its origins indirectly to Gemistos himself.

The Hermetic writings were translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino, encouraged by Cosimo de' Medici, whose interest in Platonism was stimulated by Gemistos.⁶² The Cabbala was intensively studied by Pico della Mirandola, a junior contemporary and admirer

⁶⁰ *De Iside et Osiride*, xlvi. 369 E.

⁶¹ *Epistles*, ii. 312 E.

⁶² Ficino, ii. 1537.

of Ficino.⁶³ But these two sources, which became so important to Neoplatonic studies within a generation of Gemistos' death, had no apparent influence on Gemistos himself.

Hermes Trismegistos, the 'thrice-greatest', was the Greek name for the Egyptian god Thoth. The writings attributed to him were in fact probably compiled by Egyptian Greeks in the third and following centuries AD.⁶⁴ They contain elements of Platonism and Stoicism but show almost no Christian influence. Fragments of them were quoted by many Latin authors, particularly Lactantius, a Christian of the fourth century, in his *Divinarum Institutionum libri septem*.⁶⁵ Consequently they became known to western scholars, including contemporaries of Gemistos such as Leon Battista Alberti, Nicholas Cusanus, and Matteo Palmieri. They were also often quoted by Greek writers well known to Gemistos, such as Iamblichus, Cyril of Alexandria, Cedrenus, Psellos, and Nikephoros Gregoras.⁶⁶ It was Psellos' own manuscript of Hermes Trismegistos which eventually came to Italy after Gemistos' death, and was used by Ficino for his Latin translation (published in 1471).⁶⁷ The Hermetic texts can hardly have been entirely unknown to Gemistos, so the absence of any reference to them in his surviving works calls for explanation. Perhaps he neglected them because they were an alternative and rival source of Neoplatonism to the Chaldaean Oracles, and the latter enjoyed his exclusive preference.

The absence of the Cabbala from his sources is more probably due to ignorance. These mystical expressions of Judaism were, like the Hermetic writings, over a thousand years old.⁶⁸ They too contained elements of Neoplatonism: even the transmigration of souls infiltrated their doctrines at one stage.⁶⁹ It might have been expected that Gemistos would have been introduced to the Cabbala by his Jewish teacher Elissaeus, and that it would have appealed to him. In fact, however, the Cabbala had evolved into its contemporary form almost entirely among Jews of the western diaspora, particularly in Germany,

⁶³ J. A. Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy*, ii: *The Revival of Learning* (London 1897), 240-2; P. O. Kristeller, *The Classics and Renaissance Thought* (Cambridge, Mass. 1955), 60; Knös, 160-1.

⁶⁴ W. Scott, *Hermetica*, i (Oxford 1924), 2-15.

⁶⁵ W. Scott and A. S. Ferguson, *Hermetica*, iv (Oxford 1936), 9-27.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 103, 191-227, 235, 243-6, 247-8.

⁶⁷ R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig 1904), 319-20.

⁶⁸ G. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (London 1955), 18-36 and *passim*.

⁶⁹ Scholem, *op. cit.* 241-3.

Provence, and Spain during the thirteenth century. It was only from the fourteenth century onwards that the Cabbala spread to oriental Jewry, and only in the fifteenth, after Gemistos' death, that it became known outside Jewish circles even in Italy, chiefly through Pico della Mirandola. There is no reason to suppose that the teaching of Elissaeus, of which so little is known in any case, contained any reference to the Cabbala; nor is the fact surprising.

Gemistos was thus not the only source from which Neoplatonism flowed into the western Renaissance. There were others both before and after him. The sources of his own philosophy were relatively restricted even by the standards of his time. It has been shown by Anastos that with few exceptions they were purely Greek in origin, or at least known to him only in Greek even if some of them originated in Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, or Persian.⁷⁰ Despite his own extravagant claims, most of them lay within the centuries between Plato and Proclus: that is to say, from the fourth century BC to the fifth century AD.

⁷⁰ Anastos, 281-303.

V

SOURCES OF HERESY

GEMISTOS appeared to be explicit about his philosophical sources, but certain distinctions must be made among those he named. First, the real ones must be distinguished from the imaginary. The purpose of the imaginary sources was to give the prestige of remoteness in place and time to Gemistos' own ideas. The real ones can be divided into those which he knew at first hand and those with which he had only indirect acquaintance. Some of the names he cited were real enough, but he could not have known anything authentic about their doctrines. Others he could have known only from oral hearsay or in translation. There were those, too, whom he merely mentioned in passing, as well as those whom he specifically cited as his sources. Finally, there were those who can only be inferred from his extant works, although he never mentioned them by name.

The imaginary sources are mostly named in his last work, the *Book of Laws*. They include Eumolpus, Minos, Lycurgus, Iphitus, Numa, Polyidos, Teiresias, Cheiron, the Kouretes of Crete, and Min (Menes), the first king of Egypt.¹ Of these names some stood for real persons, but nothing of their supposed doctrines could have been known to Gemistos, though he claimed the survival of oral traditions about them. Several of them fall into the category of what Gemistos called 'legislators' (*νομοθέται*), who were to him almost interchangeable with philosophers.² He used the same term even of legendary divinities, such as Dionysos and Herakles, whom he believed to have been incarnated on earth more than once.³

On the borderline between imagination and reality came Orpheus, whom Gemistos cited in support of the doctrine of the creation of the universe in time, and of its eternity.⁴ Orphism was also a source of the doctrine of metempsychosis, which appealed to Gemistos. He was much attached to the Orphic Hymns, some of which he copied in his own hand, as he did also some of the Pythagorean Golden Verses.⁵ But the poems attributed to Orpheus and Pythagoras, like the Chaldaean Oracles which he attributed to Zoroaster, were in fact composed at

¹ Alexandre, 30-3, 254-5.

² Id. 28-9.

³ Id. 256-7.

⁴ PG 160, 1012 A; Mohler, iii. 458.

⁵ Diller (1956), 37.

dates much later than their supposed origins, probably in the early Christian era.

Unlike Orpheus, both Zoroaster and Pythagoras belonged to the real world, though the doctrines which Gemistos attributed to them contain large elements of imagination. He knew little of them except at second hand, mainly through Plato in the case of Pythagoras and through Plutarch in the case of Zoroaster.⁶ He probably derived the connection between Pythagoras and Zoroaster from Aristoxenos, who recorded in the fourth century BC that Pythagoras travelled to the East to learn from the Magi.⁷

Although Gemistos referred to the 'surviving texts' of Zoroaster,⁸ he no doubt meant no more than the Chaldaean Oracles. It is clear that he had no direct knowledge of either ancient or contemporary forms of Zoroastrianism. At most he had a sort of natural sympathy with a religion of which one of its foremost western interpreters wrote that 'a Parsee would have no difficulty in finding scriptural evidence to justify a total monotheism, an uncompromising dualism, or even a barely disguised polytheism'.⁹ That Gemistos did not know Persian is evident from the fact that he thought the Persian form of Cyrus' name meant the Sun.¹⁰ That he understood Zoroastrianism imperfectly is also clear, for reincarnation was not, as he thought, a Zoroastrian doctrine, though it was Orphic and Pythagorean. As Scholarios said, he was probably introduced to Zoroastrianism by Elissaeus.¹¹ But he used the name of Zoroaster mainly to give credence to esoteric doctrines of his own.

It is hard to believe, however, that Elissaeus would have confined his teaching on Zoroaster to known Greek texts, for Jewish intellectuals were traditionally the transmitters of oriental philosophy in their own right, to both eastern and western Europe. It has been sufficiently shown that all Gemistos' explicit references to Zoroaster can be traced to Greek sources, but there may also have been cases in which Gemistos reproduced Zoroastrian ideas which came to him through oral teaching. They might also have come from non-Christian Greek sources, but if they were also to be found in Zoroastrianism, that would be a valuable endorsement in Gemistos' eyes.

One example is his devotion to the Sun as the embodiment of purifying fire and light. He had inherited this devotion primarily from Julian the Apostate and indirectly from Plato, who used the Sun as

⁶ Anastos, 288-9.

⁷ Id. 282.

⁸ PG 160, 984 B.

⁹ Zaehner, 24.

¹⁰ Opsopoeus, 50-1.

¹¹ Scholarios, iv. 153.

a symbol of the ultimate Form of the Good. The Zoroastrians also believed that Ahura Mazda, the 'wise lord', took bodily form as the Sun.¹² He was supported, like Gemistos' Zeus, by subordinate gods, the 'bounteous immortals', who were later identified with physical elements.¹³ The world, for the Zoroastrians, was 'thought into existence' by the supreme being, a doctrine similar to the emanationism of the Neoplatonists.¹⁴ Later there was a revival of the pagan belief in *daēvas* (equivalent to *δαίμονες* or demons), which turned Zoroastrianism back from monotheism towards polytheism.¹⁵ There was also a revival of fatalist doctrines superimposed on the doctrine of free will, for Ahriman was declared to have been 'evil by choice'. Once evil had entered the world, 'fate took on a menacing importance and man became a puppet in its hands'.¹⁶

Ideas such as these were familiar to Gemistos, from whatever source he derived them; and they are not to be found in the Greek sources on Zoroastrianism. But by the fourteenth century Greek and oriental philosophies were so interpenetrated that it is impossible to be dogmatic about the sources in any particular case. There was, however, one trait of temperament which Gemistos and the prophet had in common, which was antipathetic to the Greek Church. They abhorred asceticism as a blasphemy against life. It could be said of Gemistos' philosophy, as of Zoroastrianism, that it was 'neither this-worldly nor other-worldly (but) both-worldly'.¹⁷ No more apt definition of Gemistos' Hellenic humanism could be given than this summary of Zoroastrianism: 'any withdrawal from the world is a betrayal of God; for man was created for the work he has to do, not vice versa'.¹⁸

Zoroaster and Pythagoras were the most important of the real sources whom Gemistos knew only at second hand. Another who may be put in the same category was Moses, whose name was invoked in the course of Gemistos' dispute with Scholarios.¹⁹ In that context it was Scholarios rather than Gemistos who introduced the name of Moses, asserting that Plato had learned much of his philosophy—in fact, all of it that was true—from Moses.²⁰ This was a commonly held view of Hellenistic and Byzantine philosophers. From Philo the Jew of Alexandria in the first century AD down to Michael Psellos in the eleventh, it was a commonplace that Plato drew his wisdom from the Penta-

¹² Zaehner, 65.

¹⁵ Id. 81, 143-5.

¹⁸ Id. 283.

¹³ Id. 34, 46.

¹⁶ Id. 187, 192.

¹⁹ PG 160, 986 C-D.

¹⁴ Id. 45.

¹⁷ Id. 278-9.

²⁰ Scholarios, iv. 12-13.

teuch, and that he could be regarded, in the words of Numenius of Apamea, as an 'Atticizing Moses'.²¹ Moses was also thought to be the source of the theological beliefs of other classical Greeks, where those coincided with Christianity. For example, Bessarion believed that Plato and Aristotle learned of the fall of Lucifer from Homer, who called him Ate,²² and that Homer learned of it 'either by some blessing of nature or from the writings of the prophet Moses'.²³ Gemistos, however, took no definite position on the supposed indebtedness of Plato to Moses.

Apart from Moses, to whom an Orthodox Greek needed no introduction, Elissaeus presumably also taught Gemistos some of the wider doctrines of Judaism. Although he never referred to Elissaeus directly in his writings, there are two passages in which he spoke of the Jews in general terms. He said that he had learned about Averroes' doctrine of the human soul 'from certain Jews' (as well as from the 'better Italian philosophers');²⁴ and he referred, somewhat scornfully, to the Jewish doctrine on the first principle of the universe.²⁵ Gemistos would have needed no introduction to Philo of Alexandria, whom he could read in Greek; but Elissaeus would presumably have introduced him to Moses Maimonides, who studied Plato and Aristotle in relation to the Old Testament in the twelfth century; and no doubt to other Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages, but evidently not to the Cabbala.

It does not seem that Gemistos was much interested in Judaism as such, however. The flavour of Neoplatonism was obtainable elsewhere. There was no mention of the Jews in the broad general headings under which he listed his sources. In the *Book of Laws* he named the Brahmans of India, the Magi of Media, and the priests of Dodona.²⁶ In his funeral oration on the mother of the last Emperor in 1450 he extended the list but made it even less precise.²⁷ The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, he claimed, was common to the Iberians, the Celts, the Hyrcanians, the Thracians, the Hellenes, the Romans, the Egyptians, the Medes and the Indians. With the exception of the Iberians (Georgians) and the Hyrcanians (east and south of the Caspian Sea), it is possible to read plausibly behind these national designations some of the names Gemistos had in mind.

The Celts possibly meant the Druids. The Thracians meant

²¹ F. Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy*, i (London 1946), 448 (Numenius); ii (London 1950), 15 (Philo); Tatakis, 168 (Psellos).

²² *Iliad*, xix. 126-31.

²³ Mohler, ii. 242-3, ch. VII.

²⁴ PG 160, 982 D.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 1011 B.

²⁶ Alexandre, 30-3.

²⁷ PG 160, 957 A.

Gemistos' legendary teachers, Eumolpus and Orpheus. The Hellenes meant Greek philosophers in general. The Romans meant Numa, the ancient King of Rome, who was the only Roman mentioned with respect by Gemistos, apart from Julian the Apostate, a fellow Platonist and quasi-Greek.²⁸ The Egyptians meant Min (Menes), whom, it has been suggested, he may have identified with Moses;²⁹ and perhaps also the priests whom Plato met on his travels. The Medes meant Zoroaster, the Magi, and the Chaldaean Oracles. The Indians meant the Brahmans, and possibly also the Buddhists.

Gemistos knew of these sources, in so far as they genuinely existed, only through Greek writers or from Elissaeus. Much of their content had long been assimilated into Greek thought, and was connected by the common thread of Neoplatonism. Some of Gemistos' beliefs could be traced to more than one such source: for example, his adoration of the sun, which is attested both by his devoted admirers, such as Demetrios Raoul Kabakes, and by his bitterest critics, such as George Trapezuntius.³⁰ Julian had worshipped the sun a thousand years before Gemistos, and had claimed that in doing so he was following Numa,³¹ whom Gemistos also claimed as his forerunner. Plato had used the sun as a symbol of the supreme Good; so had Plotinus as a symbol for the One.³² The value of these and earlier precedents for Gemistos lay simply in the remoteness and antiquity of their names.

For similar reasons he included among his predecessors the Seven Sages: Chilon of Sparta, Solon of Athens, Bias of Priene, Thales of Miletus, Cleoboulus of Lindos, Pittacus of Mitylene, Myson of Chenai (whom he substituted for the more usual name, Periander of Corinth).³³ The only one of them who wrote anything that Gemistos could have known at first hand was Solon. He quoted the famous advice to 'look to the end', and also one of Solon's surviving poems.³⁴ Thales was presumably known to him only through Aristotle and Theophrastus. The rest, though historical figures, were no more than names associated with terse items of wise advice.

Gemistos' knowledge of genuine sources was again limited almost entirely to Greek philosophy, both classical and post-classical. Of the classical philosophers, Plato naturally stood first and Aristotle second.

²⁸ Alexandre, 30-1 (Numa); Mohler, iii. 458 (Julian).

²⁹ D. Dedes, *Ελληνικά*, 33. 1 (1981), 68.

³⁰ Masai (1956), 305 (Kabakes); Trapezuntius, book iii, penultimate chapter.

³¹ *Oratio in Solem*, 155 D.

³² *Republic*, vi. 508 A-9 D; *Enneads*, i. 7. 1; v. 1. 2.

³³ Alexandre, 32-3.

³⁴ PG 160, 940 A.

Gemistos' debts to Plato were innumerable, but perhaps the most significant, as well as the most tantalizing, was the claim that the highest philosophy could not be communicated in writing at all.³⁵ It could only mature in the minds of pupils after oral instruction from their teachers. In the same way it could only be transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition. One of Gemistos' criticisms of Aristotle was that he departed from this principle by putting everything down in writing, including the esoteric doctrines which he had learned from Plato, and incidentally misrepresenting them.³⁶

Despite the severe criticisms of Aristotle for which Gemistos was famous, his hostility was never indiscriminating. His respect for Aristotle's scientific writings is clear from the preamble to the *Book of Laws*.³⁷ There are traces of Aristotelian thought in his earlier works, such as the *Commentary* on the Chaldaean Oracles: for example, when he spoke of the 'unmoved wills' and defined movement or change as 'simply an intellectual relationship', he was echoing Aristotle's definition of God, the 'unmoved mover', as the 'intellection of intellection', or 'thought of thought' (*νόησις νοήσεως*).³⁸ He adopted also from Aristotle certain forms of reasoning, such as the acceptance of 'common ideas' (*κοινὰ ἔννοια*) as a basis for philosophical discussion: 'what everyone thinks really is so'.³⁹ Gemistos spoke in very similar terms (as did many other Greek philosophers). His objection to Aristotle's thought was not to his logic but to his metaphysics.

Of the other classical philosophers, his references to Plato's predecessors (Pythagoras, Parmenides, Protagoras, Anaxagoras) were probably based on citations from Plato, though he could have encountered them elsewhere.⁴⁰ He also quoted Pseudo-Timaeus, a much later pastiche which he mistakenly believed to be the work of Socrates' interlocutor in Plato's *Timaeus*.⁴¹ The philosophers of the fourth century BC and afterwards whom he cited were known to him either at first hand or from familiar sources. They include Archytas, Pyrrho, Epicurus, and Cleanthes.⁴² In none of these cases could it be inferred that Gemistos had access to any text which is not still extant.

³⁵ *Epistles*, vii. 341 C; *Phaedrus*, 276 C-8 B; PG 160, 983 D.

³⁶ PG 160, 984 C.

³⁷ Alexandre, 4-5.

³⁸ *Met.* xii. 1072^b7-10; 1074^b34. See p. 58 above.

³⁹ *Eth. Nic.* x. 1173^a1; *Topics*, i. 100^b18-23.

⁴⁰ Alexandre, 276 (Pythagoras); 32-3 (Pythagoras, Parmenides); 36-9 (Protagoras); Lagarde, 332 (Anaxagoras).

⁴¹ Lagarde, 334; Alexandre, 32-3.

⁴² Lagarde, 343 (Archytas); Alexandre, 36-9 (Pyrrho); Lagarde, 329 and PG 160, 1018 C (Epicurus); Mohler, iii. 462 and Alexandre, 2-5 (Cleanthes and Stoics).

His debt to the Stoics is acknowledged, although many of the doctrines which they held in common had also both an earlier ancestry than Stoicism and a later evolution into Neoplatonism. Characteristic of the Stoics was the belief in the harmony of the universe, in the operation of universal reason even among animals and inorganic matter, in the four cardinal virtues, and in the voluntary submission of mankind to the divinely appointed order.⁴³ They also justified polytheism, but regarded prayers and sacrifices as having no influence on the divine order. All these notions were reflected in Gemistos' works.

On the other hand, he departed from Stoicism in certain respects. The Stoics condoned suicide, which Gemistos did not; though he used the argument that suicide was possible as contributory proof of the immortality of the soul.⁴⁴ The Stoics also rejected Plato's transcendental Forms, which Gemistos on the contrary adopted and developed as the foundation of his philosophical system. His conception of 'common ideas' also differed from that of the Stoics. To the latter, they were 'innate ideas'; to Gemistos, they were 'generally received opinions'.⁴⁵

His post-classical sources began with Plutarch, whom he used as a historian rather than a philosopher. They continued with the Neoplatonists and the commentators on Aristotle. Of the Neoplatonists, he mentioned Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Julian the Apostate, Proclus, and Maximus.⁴⁶ With Julian in particular he shared a devotion to the Sun, an admiration of the Chaldaean Oracles, and a preference for paganism. To these names Bessarion added a few more in a letter to his master: Hermeias, Damascius, Syrianus, Ammonius, Olympiodorus;⁴⁷ and these of course must also have been familiar to Gemistos. Of the commentators on Aristotle, he quoted Alexander of Aphrodisias, John Philoponus, and Simplicius. His reference to Alexander was critical; that to Philoponus was neutral and factual; Simplicius he compared unfavourably with Plotinus.⁴⁸ It was a general theme with Gemistos that Aristotelianism was incompatible with Christian orthodoxy.

This theme undoubtedly concealed an element of hypocrisy. It

⁴³ F. Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy*, i (London 1946), 386-400.

⁴⁴ PG 160, 957 A.

⁴⁵ Masai (1956), 115-21.

⁴⁶ Mohler, iii. 458; Alexandre, 32-3; PG 160, 981 C.

⁴⁷ Mohler, iii. 455-8.

⁴⁸ Lagarde, 327-8 (Alexander of Aphrodisias); PG 160, 1002 C (Philoponus); PG 160, 981 B (Simplicius).

pleased Gemistos to tease his Orthodox friends and opponents by claiming that it was Aristotle, not Plato, who was really irreconcilable with Christianity, thus undermining the assumptions of both the Greek and the Latin Churches. In fact it was Gemistos' own commitment to Christianity that was becoming more and more sceptical and unreal. But he had been brought up in a conventionally Orthodox family, and he knew well the patristic literature which he sought to subvert.

Both Cardinal Bessarion, his former pupil, and the Patriarch Joseph II testified to Gemistos' mastery of theology.⁴⁹ That he was sufficiently familiar with the Greek fathers is shown by his references to John of Damascus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Justin Martyr, Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus.⁵⁰ Of the later theologians, his only reference was to Thomas Aquinas, whose works he apparently knew from the fourteenth-century translations by Demetrios Kydones and others.⁵¹ But his attitude to Greek theology was generally ironic and polemical. He pretended, for example, to find a hint of the Arian heresy in one of Scholarios' arguments, largely in a spirit of mockery rather than in condemnation.⁵² He commonly referred to Orthodox theologians as 'sophists'.⁵³ Christianity, for him, was just one among many variants of religious belief, with no special claim on the allegiance of a philosopher. He was not interested in controversial topics such as Hesychasm nor in heresies such as Bogomilism, neither of which he ever mentioned. His sole reference to Demetrios Kydones, who had deserted the Orthodox Church for Roman Catholicism, was on a point of Platonic exegesis, not theology.⁵⁴

If any theologians of recent times influenced Gemistos at all, they were men whom he never mentioned but whose ideas can sometimes be traced in his works. Two in particular, both of whom fell under suspicion of heresy, were Photios in the ninth century and Michael Psellos in the eleventh. Photios was a former civilian official who twice became Patriarch of Constantinople in controversial circumstances. With a curious similarity to Gemistos, he was accused of having sold his soul in his youth to a Jewish magician. But he had little more in common with Gemistos than a desire to revive classical studies, which

⁴⁹ Mohler, iii. 470 (Bessarion); Syropoulos, vii. 17 (Joseph).

⁵⁰ PG 160, 978 C-D. ⁵¹ Ibid. 1011 B. ⁵² Ibid. 986 D.

⁵³ Alexandre, 18-19, 258-9, and *passim*; Scholarios, iv. 154.

⁵⁴ Mohler, iii. 467.

led to accusations of paganism. Unlike Gemistos, he sought ways of reconciling pagan philosophy with Christianity; and despite his Platonist sympathies, he did not try to discredit Aristotle.⁵⁵

Psellos also tried to reconcile paganism with Christianity, but he was otherwise a man more after Gemistos' heart. He had studied under John Mavropous, who, although he later became a bishop, wrote a poem claiming that Plato and Plutarch were practically Christians. Psellos himself sought to illustrate the truths of Christianity from the 'omnifarious thought' of Plato and Plotinus. Like the 'admirable Proclus' before him and Gemistos after him, he wrote a commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles, but not without references to the Fathers of the Church. In other respects there was a closer affinity between his thought and that of Gemistos. A similar affinity was even more marked in the case of John Italos, Psellos' successor in the chair of philosophy at Constantinople.⁵⁶

It was characteristic of Psellos and Italos, as it was of Gemistos, that they regarded the pagan gods with a seriousness which had had no parallel for many centuries. Nor were they alone. In the Catholic West, too, some acknowledged the possibility that a divine reality might be hidden behind the false doctrines of pagan mythology. Dante took the hypothesis sufficiently seriously to put it even in the mouth of Beatrice.⁵⁷ But the Greek heretics went further.

There are echoes of Psellos and Italos in Gemistos' conception of Zeus and Poseidon. Psellos adopted Zeus as the symbol of reason; for Gemistos he was the transcendent deity whose thought generated the universe. A follower of Italos, who was executed by drowning in the Bosphorus, died crying: 'Poseidon, receive me!'⁵⁸ Gemistos' Poseidon, it has been said, 'nous rappelle parfois Jésus'.⁵⁹ Italos and Gemistos have even been linked as the only two significant secular philosophers of Byzantium.⁶⁰ Their affinity can be judged from Anna Komnena's account of Italos' trial for heresy, at which he was accused of believing in reincarnation, insulting the holy icons, and teaching heresies about the Platonic Forms.⁶¹

The classical revival in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, tinged like that in Gemistos' time with Neoplatonism and paganism, was in some ways even more marked, because it affected the arts as well as philosophy. In the eleventh century classical themes reappeared in

⁵⁵ Tatakis, 129-34.

⁵⁶ Id. 161-210 (Psellos); 210-17 (Italos).

⁵⁷ *Paradiso*, iv. 55-63.

⁵⁸ Tatakis, 215.

⁵⁹ Id. 303.

⁶⁰ C. Cavarnos, *Byzantine Thought and Art* (Belmont, Mass. 1968), 16. ⁶¹ *Alexiad*, v. 9.

miniatures, ivories, and enamel work;⁶² but these did not recur in the fourteenth century, when the new classical revival seems to have been confined to literature and philosophy. Among the features of the later revival was the re-emergence of the term 'Hellenism' to describe modern as well as classical Greek civilization, instead of serving merely as an equivalent of paganism. This innovation was used in the early fourteenth century, and in isolated cases even earlier.⁶³ But strictly Orthodox Greeks repudiated it. Scholarios would not call himself a Hellene;⁶⁴ Hellenism was in fact part of his indictment against Gemistos.⁶⁵

A different, indeed incompatible, source of heresy which has been suggested in Gemistos' case was Islam.⁶⁶ It has even been argued that he used Zoroastrianism as a cloak for advocating Muslim doctrine, but the evidence is very slight. Scholarios did indeed include Averroes among the influences to which Elissaeus exposed Gemistos.⁶⁷ But Scholarios had studied Averroes himself; and in any case Averroes was far from being an orthodox Muslim. Although Gemistos mentioned both Averroes and Avicenna in his writings, he seems to have had no high opinion of them. He considered Averroes even more mistaken than Aristotle about the human soul.⁶⁸ He also linked Avicenna with Aristotle in a phrase slighting to them both.⁶⁹ His acquaintance with them was limited to what he learned from the Jews and Italians: perhaps an example was an extract he made from Kydones' translation of Aquinas, referring to Averroes.⁷⁰ But he found western philosophers to be too much influenced by Arabic interpretations of Aristotle.⁷¹

On the other hand, he showed respect for the qualities of the races which adhered to Islam, particularly the Turks. He admired their political stability and martial prowess.⁷² He counted Muhammad as a 'legislator', a term which was almost equivalent to a 'philosopher' in

⁶² D. Talbot Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era* (London 1963), 78-86.

⁶³ S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge 1970), 19; R. Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (London 1980), 144.

⁶⁴ Scholarios, iii. 253. 4-5.

⁶⁵ Id. iv. 114, 154, 180.

⁶⁶ F. Täschner, 'Georgios Gemistos Plethon, ein Beitrag zur Frage der Übertragung von islamischem Geistesgut nach dem Abendlande', *Der Islam*, 18 (1929), 236-43; D. Dedes, "Θρησκεία και πολιτική κατά τον Γεώργιο Γεμιστό Πλήθωνα", *Φιλοσοφία*, 5-6 (1975-6), 424-41. For the contrary case, see Anastos, 270-303.

⁶⁷ Scholarios, iv. 153. 1-2.

⁶⁸ Lagarde, 321.

⁶⁹ Id. 322-3; see p. 193 below.

⁷⁰ PG 160, 982 D; Dedes, *Ελληνικά*, 33. 1 (1981), 72-3.

⁷¹ PG 160, 1006 B.

⁷² Ibid. 844 A; Lambros, iii. 310.

his vocabulary.⁷³ He may conceivably have been aware of the ecumenical movement which was on foot in his lifetime among Turkish reformers, though his own view of religious reconciliation was different. At any rate, he understood that Islam was a way of life as well as a religion, and found it more sympathetic than Christian asceticism. These sympathies would account for the violent attacks made on him posthumously by George Trapezuntius, who bracketed Plato, Muhammad, and Gemistos together as the three most evil men in the history of the human race (though curiously enough, Trapezuntius also had ecumenical visions of his own).⁷⁴

There is no evidence that Gemistos had ever studied the Koran. But abundant information was available to him on Islam, apart from the teaching of Elissaeus. There was a study of Islam by a thirteenth-century Dominican, Ricoldus de Santa Croce, which had been translated into Greek by Kydones;⁷⁵ and a dialogue written by the Emperor Manuel himself in 1391, based on his debate with a Muslim scholar at Ankara.⁷⁶ There was also Gemistos' own experience of living in a Muslim city, whether Brusa or Adrianople. But it is hardly possible to find anything in Islamic teaching which is reproduced in Gemistos' philosophy, except perhaps the attempt to reconcile determinism with individual responsibility. On the other hand, there is also nothing in Gemistos' work to match the conventional vituperation of Orthodox theologians against Islam. This is hardly surprising, since Arab philosophers were no less interested than Gemistos in both classical Greek philosophy and Neoplatonism; and especially in Plotinus and Proclus.

The testimony of Scholarios added little to the list of sources given by Gemistos himself. Names which he mentioned, such as the mathematicians Eudoxus and Marinus, and the great St Augustine,⁷⁷ cannot

⁷³ 'Muhammad the leader and legislator of the Arabs', in Gemistos' extract from Cedrenus: Diller (1956), 37; Dedes, *Ἑλληνικά*, 33. 1 (1981), 67, citing the autograph text. For the comparison of legislators and philosophers, see Alexandre, 28-9.

⁷⁴ Trapezuntius, book iii, penultimate chapter. For the Turkish reformers, see Mamalakis (1955), 508-13; also P. Charanis, *Social, Economic and Political Life in the Byzantine Empire* (London 1973), ch. VI, pp. 229-30; and M. Balivet, 'Deux partisans de la fusion des Chrétiens et des musulmans au XV^e siècle', *Byzantina*, 10 (1980), 361-96, where the case of Trapezuntius is also discussed.

⁷⁵ G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: a Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago 1946), 49.

⁷⁶ J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1969), 97; text in E. Trapp, *Manuel II Palaiologos, Dialoge mit einem 'Perser'* (Vienna 1966).

⁷⁷ Scholarios, iv. 77 (Marinus); 95 (Eudoxus); 139 (St Augustine).

have been less familiar to Gemistos than to Scholarios. But within the known catalogue of names, Scholarios sought to establish a very different priority from that implied by Gemistos. His purpose was to convict Gemistos of heresy. He brushed aside all the imaginary sources as a mere smokescreen to hide more sinister influences. Although his accusations of deceit were exaggerated and sometimes incoherent, a large measure of truth underlay them.

He was surely right in regarding Gemistos as a would-be heresiarch,⁷⁸ though the method used was not to proselytize but merely to formulate a new theology and leave it to generate its own following. He was also right in attributing much of Gemistos' philosophy to Proclus, one of the latest heads of the Platonic Academy at Athens, who died in AD 485. There was no secrecy about the fact that Proclus was a pagan at a time when pagan practices were outlawed. To be influenced by his theology was therefore, in Scholarios' eyes, a grave heresy. It was not quite true, as Scholarios alleged, that Gemistos was 'silent' about his debt to Proclus: Gemistos named him in at least one work known to Scholarios, as well as in a letter to Bessarion of which Scholarios may not have been aware.⁷⁹ But it is true that Gemistos did not give the name of Proclus as much emphasis as his debt to him would have justified. This was no doubt a simple measure of prudence.

Scholarios' indictment was also not so clear as the facts would have justified. In a letter written after Gemistos' death, he alleged that:

He has taken almost everything from Proclus' works, in which there is no other theme but the multiplicity of gods and generation, order, difference, and activity in the universe and human souls and everything related to investigating them, and stars and everything he thought relevant to their study according to his private doctrine.⁸⁰

The gravamen of these complaints seems to lie in polytheism and the 'private doctrine'. Modern scholars are more precise about Gemistos' debt to Proclus, and they place the gravamen elsewhere.

The influence of Proclus on Gemistos cannot be entirely distinguished from that of Plato himself, as well as that of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, even if Scholarios was right in regarding Proclus as the most influential of them all. To Plato Gemistos clearly owed the doctrine of the separated Forms, the duality of body and soul, the creation of the World-soul, the pursuit of the Good through reason

⁷⁸ Ibid. 159-60.

⁷⁹ PG 160, 981 c; Mohler, iii. 458.

⁸⁰ Scholarios, iv. 153.

and knowledge, the pre-existence and immortality of the human soul. These became commonplaces of all the Neoplatonists.

To Neoplatonism Gemistos further owed the theories of the hierarchy or chain of being, the status of man as an intermediary being between the divine and earthly worlds, the emanation of the universe from the One (or the Divine), the aim of assimilation with the Divine, the distinction of the rational and the irrational soul, the soul's return to the place of light, the identification of matter with evil (or non-being), and the transformation of the Forms first into Ideas in the mind of God and then into Minds themselves. But for Gemistos God was less of a pure abstraction than the One of the Neoplatonists. He was personal, though transcendental, and his name was Zeus.

The most distinctive contribution of the Neoplatonists to Gemistos' philosophy was the triadic structure both of this deity and of the universe which emanated from his unity. Taken together, these notions seemed to some of the more liberal Greek theologians to amount to an anticipation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Bessarion discussed this view with sympathy, especially towards Plato;⁸¹ but Scholarios firmly rejected it.⁸² Gemistos evidently found it attractive throughout his life.

The notions of a triadic deity and a triadic universe had a long history in Greek philosophy. The form in which they came down to Gemistos was due to a cryptic passage in Plato's second Epistle:

Related to the King of All are all things, and for his sake they exist, and of all things good he is the cause. And related to the Second are the second things; and related to the Third the third things.⁸³

The first application of this theory to theology was made by the Neopythagorean Numenius in the second century AD. He distinguished a first god who is pure thought, a second god who is the creator, and a third god who is the created world.⁸⁴ Gemistos' interpretation of the Chaldaean Oracles was similar.

The theory had become much elaborated between the second and the fourteenth centuries. Plotinus postulated three hypostases—the One, the divine Mind (*νοῦς*), and the Soul (*ψυχή*)—of which the last two emanated in succession from the first.⁸⁵ It was he who first quoted Plato's second Epistle as his authority.⁸⁶ To his basic triad Proclus

⁸¹ Mohler, ii. 94-7, 282-3.

⁸² Scholarios, iv. 131.

⁸³ *Epistles*, ii. 312 E; see p. 59 above.

⁸⁴ F. Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy*, i (London 1946), 448.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 467-8.

⁸⁶ *Enneads*, v. i. 8.

added a further array of triads: being, difference, and identity; resting, proceeding, and returning; faith, truth, and love; the good, the beautiful, and the just; and more besides. These notions became so ingrained in the minds of Neoplatonists that they sought triads everywhere. Gemistos' writings are full of them; and a generation after him Marsilio Ficino, the heir to his tradition, wrote that 'every philosopher who is inspired by Plato considers three aspects of everything'.⁸⁷

There was much else that Gemistos inherited from the Neoplatonists, down to particular uses of language. One example was the significance of fire, which recurred many times in the Chaldaean Oracles. Fire had a special significance also for the Zoroastrians, which may have been among the reasons why Gemistos attributed the Oracles to Zoroaster. But his own thought was closer to Plotinus than to Zoroaster. Plotinus compared the relation of the One and Mind with the radiation of fire and with the light of the Sun.⁸⁸ Gemistos' *Commentary* on the Oracles shows that this symbolism appealed to him. Plotinus also accepted Plato's assumption that the heavenly bodies were composed of fire.⁸⁹ In effect, he rejected Aristotle's theory of a 'fifth element' as the substance of the celestial universe; and here too Gemistos followed him.

The *Commentary* shows much other evidence of the influence of Plotinus. There was the theory of matter—that it is equivalent to non-existence and therefore evil, but that the material world is nevertheless good. There was the theory of the soul—that it comes from its true home in another world, to which it always aspires to return. There was the reconciliation of free will and determinism, which Gemistos expressed in the phrase: 'Do not try to achieve what is beyond your fate.' In his last work, the *Book of Laws*, there were still more echoes of Plotinus. Soul subsisted throughout the hierarchy of being, down to animals and plants; the human soul went through a continuing cycle of ascents to the other world and descents to this world; the function of prayer was not to influence the deity, which was transcendent and therefore immovable, but to seek union with the One.⁹⁰ Some chapters of the *Laws* bear titles identical, or nearly so, with those of the *Enneads*.

It was Proclus, however, rather than Plotinus whom Scholarios regarded as Gemistos' evil genius. Much that Gemistos could have

⁸⁷ Ficino, ii. 1321.

⁸⁸ *Enneads*, v. 1. 2; v. 3. 12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* ii. 1. 4-7.

⁹⁰ For Plotinus' philosophy in general, see A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus* (London 1953); P. V. Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism* (Cambridge 1952).

found in Plotinus could equally well have been received by way of Proclus, who refined and elaborated it. But what made Proclus worse than Plotinus in Scholarios' eyes was his active belief in pagan mythology. Plotinus displayed a tolerant indifference towards the Olympian religion. He would use the names of pagan gods as symbols for elements in his system: for example, he labelled the One, Mind, and Soul as Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus;⁹¹ but he did so with no more serious intent than a seventeenth-century poet would use Venus and Cupid as symbols of love. Proclus, on the other hand, not merely believed in the pagan gods but claimed to have personal contact with them. In philosophical terms, he called them the 'divine henads', forming a hierarchy which culminated in the One.⁹² A number of passages in his *Elements of Theology* are closely paralleled in Gemistos' *Laws*.⁹³

There are also echoes of Proclus in the *Commentary* on the Chaldaean Oracles. In particular, the nature of the Father does not correspond to the divine creator in the Christian religion. The word 'paternal' is applied both by Proclus and by Gemistos to the ultimate Good, which is identical with the One. But the paternal function, in both cases, is lower than the ultimate causality of the One, though higher than the purely creative function, which is that of a lower god.⁹⁴ The *πατήρ* or *πατρικὸς νοῦς* is thus distinct from the *δημιουργός* or craftsman of the universe. In this respect Proclus, the Oracles and Gemistos' *Commentary* are at one.

Gemistos also followed Proclus in the adjectives which he applied to the transcendent, ultimate being. Proclus called the One 'incapable of participation' and 'detached' (*ἀμέθεκτον* and *ἐξηρημένον*).⁹⁵ Gemistos called the Father 'in no wise communicable' (*οὐδὲ ὅλως μεταδοτόν*), and he used a word from the same root as that of Proclus for 'detached' (*ἐξάιρετον*). Many other examples appear to derive from direct imitation of language. The 'vehicle of the soul' (*ὄχημα ψυχῆς*), that insubstantial intermediary between body and soul, is borrowed from Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*.⁹⁶ Gemistos also borrowed the term 'Platonic Theology' from a work of Proclus, and passed it on to Marsilio Ficino.

⁹¹ Pistorius, *op. cit.* 61.

⁹² Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford 1933), p. 115.

⁹³ Proclus, *op. cit.*, 9 (proposition 8); 13 (prop. 11); 23 (prop. 20); 29 (prop. 25); 31 (prop. 27); 36 (prop. 36); 101 (prop. 113); 113 (prop. 126); and *passim*.

⁹⁴ Proclus, *In Parmenidem* (*Opera Inedita*, ed. V. Cousin, Paris 1864), 895. 7-11.

⁹⁵ Proclus, *op. cit.* 710. 36-9, 1180. 6-10. ⁹⁶ Proclus, *In Timaeum*, v. 320 D-1 D.

Proclus' commentary on the Oracles survives only in fragments, but the tenth-century *Suda* ('Suidas') states that its theme was to reconcile them with the doctrines of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato.⁹⁷ This was also Gemistos' aim. It is impossible to judge how much he borrowed from Proclus' commentary: it has been suggested that he owed more to earlier Neoplatonists than to Proclus.⁹⁸ But Scholarios was clearly right in regarding Proclus as a major influence on Gemistos.

What chiefly offended Scholarios, however, rather than imitation in matters of detail, was the provocatively anti-Christian flavour of Gemistos' presentation. The combination of a triadic structure of the deity and the universe with a revival of pagan theology, both of them borrowed from Proclus, was turned into a direct and taunting challenge to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, Gemistos also had his Trinity, composed of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hera, with Zeus elevated above the other two.⁹⁹ He also had the equivalent of angels between the deity and mankind, but he called them *δαίμονες* and claimed that they were subject to Hermes.¹⁰⁰ All this was deeply shocking to Scholarios, and provocative because it came near enough to Christianity to constitute a real challenge.

Yet there is a paradox about Scholarios' indignation. He abominated Gemistos' attachment to Neoplatonism in general and to Proclus in particular, but he failed to appreciate how deeply Christianity itself had been infused with such ideas. Like every theologian, whether Orthodox or Catholic, Scholarios accepted the works of Dionysius the Areopagite as virtually canonical. He was unaware that the author of these works was not, as later scholarship has shown, the Athenian converted by St Paul¹⁰¹ but a follower of Proclus who lived in the late fifth century. Pseudo-Dionysius has been described ironically as 'the unknown eccentric who within a generation of Proclus' death conceived the idea of dressing his philosophy in Christian draperies and passing it off as the work of a convert of St Paul'.¹⁰² He was in fact a Christian Neoplatonist, in whom the Neoplatonism was uppermost. By rights he should have been condemned by Scholarios along with Proclus.

⁹⁷ 'Suidas', *Lexicon*, s.v. *Πρόκλος*.

⁹⁸ Th. Nikolaou, 'Georgios Gemistos Plethon und Proklos: Plethons "Neoplatonismus" am Beispiel seiner Psychologie', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 32. 4 (1982), 387-99.

⁹⁹ Alexandre, 104-7, 142-3.

¹⁰⁰ Id. 160-1.

¹⁰¹ Acts 17: 34.

¹⁰² E. R. Dodds, introduction to Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford 1933), p. xxvii.

But even had Scholarios seen the truth of the matter, Gemistos would still not have been exempt from his wrath. For Gemistos was not a Christian Neoplatonist, as Pseudo-Dionysius had been, but a reactionary anti-Christian Neoplatonist, as much a pagan at heart as Proclus. He did not wish to reconcile Christianity and Neoplatonism but to abolish Christianity and replace it by Neoplatonism in Olympian draperies. He might claim to have added a new and distinctive layer to the deep deposit of Neoplatonic ideas which had accumulated over Greek philosophy for more than a thousand years. But his real significance was that he gave them a new and powerful impetus in western Europe.

VI

AFFAIRS OF STATE

WHEN Gemistos was born, if a date shortly before 1360 is correct, the long decline of the Byzantine Empire had been temporarily stabilized, but it was none the less irreversible.¹ Territorial, economic, political and even ecclesiastical disruption threatened its survival. Although the Empire had recovered Constantinople from the aggressive Franks of the Fourth Crusade and destroyed the Latin Empire, which survived only from 1204 to 1261, it had never recovered its own unity. Rival Greek dynasties survived in Epirus, based on Arta, and in Anatolia, based on Trebizond. Serbs and Bulgars invaded Byzantine territory from the north, and Ottoman Turks from the east—all of them at first rashly invited into Greek territory by the leaders of quarrelling factions.

It was only in the Peloponnese that the Greeks had lasting success in recovering lost ground. Even there they had to contend with the successors of the Crusaders: French and Florentine, Venetian and Genoese, Catalan and Navarrese. At the same time the economy of Constantinople fell under the control of the Italian merchant-states, principally Venice, Genoa, and Florence. The only hope for the Empire lay in the propensity of the predators to fight each other. The Venetians fought the Genoese, the Navarrese fought the Catalans, the Serbs and Bulgars fought the Turks. But the Empire itself was also divided by civil wars. They fought each other over a minuscule territory which was finally reduced to the environs of Constantinople, the Peloponnese, and a handful of islands.

The dynastic quarrels between the successors of Michael VIII Palaiologos, who had recovered Constantinople from the Latins in 1261, were aggravated by elements of social and religious revolution, as well as foreign intervention. In the civil war (1341-7) between John V Palaiologos and his father-in-law, John VI Cantacuzene, two strange coalitions fought each other, though neither was homogeneous. John V, the legitimate Emperor, was supported by the higher clergy, the

¹ For the historical background to this chapter, I have relied particularly on the following works: *The Cambridge Medieval History*, iv. 1 (Cambridge 1966); D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453* (London 1972); D. A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée* (2 vols., rev. edn. London 1975); Steven Runciman, *Mistra* (London 1980).

lower classes in many cities, and the Serb ruler Stephen Dušan, who hoped to inherit the Empire himself. John VI, the usurper, was supported by the monks, the landed nobility, and the Turks. Although John VI prevailed in 1347, he accepted his son-in-law as co-Emperor, and finally abdicated in 1354, to live another thirty years as a monk and the best historian of his age. A few years after his abdication, Gemistos was born into this troubled world.

The legacy of the civil war was social as well as political. In the fourteenth century popular revolts, by peasants or artisans or both, were common in many parts of Europe, including England, France, Burgundy, Italy, and Germany. The unrest was aggravated by famine and plague, particularly the Black Death (1348-9), which ravaged all Europe. The uprising of the self-styled Zealots in Thessalonica was part of the same pattern. From 1342 to 1350 Thessalonica, still the second city of the Empire, was ruled by a kind of popular Commune, violently opposed to John VI and the aristocracy.

Although the Zealots were eventually defeated, John VI recognized that a new political phenomenon had occurred. Democracy was unthinkable (though the word was used, in a pejorative sense); but John VI more than once convened representative gatherings at which he explained his policies, though he chose the representatives himself. Later in the century his less sensitive successors were to find their policies frustrated by outbreaks of popular disapproval, often led by the monks and lower clergy.

The bitterness of the civil wars was compounded by religious disputes. Michael VIII (1258-82) offended the Church by the circumstances of his accession and by his attempts to achieve Union with the Latins, to which he committed himself personally through his representative at the Council of Lyon in 1274. His son and successor, Andronikos II (1282-1328), although married successively to two Latin wives, repudiated the Union and allowed the subject to lapse for half a century. But after him the subject was mooted again and again without further result.

Numerous unsuccessful embassies travelled in each direction. On the Greek side the motive was chiefly to obtain western help against the Turks. On the Latin side there was a stubborn insistence that the decision of the Council of Lyon should first be put into effect. At the same time the Greeks made the prospect of Union worse by finding a new cause of division over Hesychasm.

Hesychasm was a theory of mystical contemplation which had

fortuitous affinities with the contemporary mysticism of Eckhart and Tauler in Germany. Certain monks of Mount Athos claimed to have found a method of prayer, asceticism, and contemplation which enabled them, after long practice, to achieve unity with God and to see the uncreated light of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. They were ridiculed by Barlaam of Calabria, a learned Aristotelian, who came to Constantinople in 1341. A Greek himself, he regarded his Greek antagonists with intellectual scorn. But the monks, being indifferent to secular learning, saw no force in his argument that the deification (*θέωσις*) of man was irreconcilable with the transcendence of God.

Many Greek theologians, including Nikephoros Gregoras and Demetrios Kydones, thought the Hesychasts were heretical. But Gregory Palamas, the Archbishop of Thessalonica, came to their support with an argument postulating a distinction between God's essence, which remains unknowable, and his energies, which can be directly experienced by created beings. Barlaam returned to Italy in disgust. Palamas won his case with the Orthodox Church and was canonized after his death. Hesychasm was formally adopted into Orthodox theology in 1351.

The doctrinal issues belong to ecclesiastical history. For the life and times of Gemistos, born a few years after the official end of the controversy, two points are important. Hesychasm widened the gulf between the Greek and Latin Churches; and it accentuated the antagonism between Aristotelians and Platonists. The Latins, under the influence of St Thomas Aquinas, had accepted Aristotle as theoretically reconcilable with Christian theology. Plato was still little known in the west, and even in the east his name was under a cloud until the fourteenth century. But Hesychasm found philosophical support in Neoplatonism. Consequently Aristotelians like Barlaam and Kydones, both of whom later became Catholics, vigorously opposed Hesychasm, while Platonists like Palamas supported it. Echoes of the dispute still could be heard in Gemistos' time, down to the Council of Union in 1438-9. Gemistos himself, however, took no position on the Hesychast controversy.

These internal disputes, both secular and theological, supposedly belonged to the past when Gemistos was growing up in Constantinople. But the external dangers were becoming graver year by year. Most of Anatolia had been lost to the Turks by the middle of the fourteenth century, in many cases by troops and commanders who offered

little resistance and even defected to Islam. By 1354 the Turks had established a foothold in Europe by capturing Gallipoli (Kallipolis). A year later the Emperor John V (1354-91) offered his submission to the Pope as the price of military aid. He further offered to have his eldest son, Andronikos, instructed in Latin, along with other young nobles, and to send his second son, Manuel, as a hostage to the Pope. But after several years of discussion, nothing came of these proposals.

Civil war broke out again between John V and his eldest son, who ruled as Andronikos IV from 1376 to 1379; and again briefly between John V and his grandson, John VII, in 1390. By the time Manuel II succeeded his father in 1391, the condition of the Empire was desperate. In that year Thessalonica was under siege, and so was Constantinople for the first time by the Turks. In 1392 the new Sultan Bayezit I (1389-1402) summoned Manuel as his vassal to take up a post in the Ottoman navy in the Black Sea. Another Turkish fleet attacked Chios, Euboea (Negroponte), and Attica. In 1393 a Turkish army invaded Thessaly and marched unimpeded to the Gulf of Corinth. The siege of Constantinople was renewed in 1394.

The ultimate humiliation, in the same year, was a summons to Serrai, where Bayezit had his camp, of Manuel and his brother Theodore I, Despot of the Morea, together with other vassals of the Sultan. After being threatened with execution, they were at last allowed to depart, except for Theodore, who was detained but later escaped. A Turkish army pursued him to the Peloponnese and campaigned there between 1395 and 1397. In the latter year the Turks destroyed the Hexamilion, a defensive wall across the Isthmus of Corinth, which had originally been built by Justinian in the sixth century. These events formed the background to the earliest composition from Gemistos' pen that can be approximately dated.

Manuel, like his father John V, had sent repeated embassies to the west to seek aid. The most recent and most notable of his emissaries were Demetrios Kydones, the translator of Aquinas, and Manuel Chrysoloras, the first Greek professor to be appointed (in 1397) at the University of Florence. But the only outcome of Manuel's appeals was the ill-fated crusade, organized by King Sigismund of Hungary, which was defeated by Bayezit at Nicopolis in 1396. Three years later Manuel himself set out for the west on a desperate quest for help.

The help came from an unexpected direction while he was in France, after a largely fruitless visit to England. In August 1402 the Mongols under Timur-i-lenk defeated the Turks at the battle of

Ankara, and took Bayezit prisoner. Manuel hurried home on receiving the good news, to find that his role and that of the Ottoman dynasty were virtually reversed. He was now the arbiter in the struggle for power between Bayezit's sons. For the next ten years the Byzantine Empire seemed to have a real chance of survival. It was in this decade that Gemistos re-emerged at Mistra.

Mistra was regarded, though over-optimistically, as a haven of security in the Empire's troubled years. It provided a refuge from the misfortunes of Constantinople and Thessalonica—siege, plague, and civil unrest. The retired Emperor John VI moved from his monastery on Mount Athos to Mistra to escape the plague in 1361, and lived there until his death in 1383. His grandson, Manuel II, left his wife and children in the Peloponnese rather than at Constantinople when he travelled to the west in 1399. The correspondence of Demetrios Kydones shows that others, less exalted, took the same refuge in the second half of the fourteenth century.

In the 1360s Kydones wrote to a friend whom he called 'George the Philosopher' (at one time mistakenly identified with Gemistos himself, though he was only a child at the time),² gently chiding him for withdrawing to the Peloponnese 'because in your excessive love of Hellenism you imagined that the very soil of Sparta would enable you to see Lycurgus'.³ In a later letter to one of the Despots (probably Theodore I), Kydones wrote that 'after the general shipwreck' which he already foresaw, many Greeks would take refuge at his court in Mistra.⁴ He even contemplated settling there himself in his old age, though he never did so.⁵

Kydones knew the state of the Peloponnese well, if only as a traveller passing through on his visits to Italy and back. Like John VI, who described it as 'more of a wasteland than Scythia',⁶ he was deeply shocked by the devastation caused to the peninsula by the alien wars between Venice and Genoa. But at least Mistra had some hope of survival when Constantinople and Thessalonica had virtually none. In the fifteenth century it became in effect the second capital city of the dying Empire.

The Despotate had an independent administration and conducted

² Masai (1956), 50-2.

³ *Démétrius Cydonès: Correspondance*, ed. R. J. Loenertz, i (Rome 1956), 63. 19-20.

⁴ *Ibid.* ii (Rome 1960), 408. 78-80.

⁵ *Ibid.* 408. 86-91.

⁶ Ioannes Cantacuzenus, *Historiarum libri IV*, CSHB XXV-XXVII (Bonn 1828-32), iii. 85. 23.

its own diplomatic relations. This was a natural arrangement, since communications with Italy and the West were easier from Mistra than from Constantinople, and even easier than between Mistra and the capital itself. Moreover, from 1383 every Despot was a son or brother of the reigning Emperor, to whom they all remained loyal even if they quarrelled with each other. However autonomous in practice, the Despotate continued to provide useful services to the capital.

Among other examples, the Despot Theodore II kept a bastard son of Sultan Murat I in protective custody at Mistra in case he might be useful as a rival claimant to the Ottoman throne; the future Despot Thomas Palaiologos was sent there with the future historian George Sphrantzes, both as boys, to escape the plague at Constantinople in the winter of 1417-18;⁷ and Andronikos Palaiologos, the Despot in charge of Thessalonica, took refuge there in 1423 after ceding his city to the Venetians.⁸ In the last days of the Empire Sphrantzes again relied on the security of Mistra to leave his son, his wife's family, and his 'movable wealth' there when he was appointed to high office at Constantinople in 1451.⁹

There were other attractions also for a man of Gemistos' character. Mistra was a centre of culture and intellect, and above all freedom of thought. It had a cosmopolitan atmosphere, enriched with small colonies of Spaniards, Venetians, Genoese, and Florentines; and outside the town there was a settlement of Jews, though none who could be compared with Gemistos' former tutor, Elissaeus. Mistra has even been called 'a Paris of the eastern Mediterranean'¹⁰—but also 'little more than a village'.¹¹ It seemed a natural haven both for Greeks who had been converted to the Roman Church and for those who had no interest in any Church.

'Hellenism' was the term which Kydones applied to the motives of George the Philosopher for emigrating to Mistra. It was an appropriate term, for ancient traditions had been slower to die out in the southern Peloponnese than anywhere else in the Empire. Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos recorded that the people of the Mani were known as Hellenes because they once worshipped wooden idols and were baptized only in the ninth century.¹² Gemistos himself was to claim that the Peloponnesians were more truly Hellenes than other

⁷ Sphrantzes, 248 (Pseudo-Phrantzes).

⁸ Nicol, 350-1.

⁹ Sphrantzes, 374 (Pseudo-Phrantzes).

¹⁰ Knös, 103.

¹¹ S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople* (Cambridge 1965), 12.

¹² Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando Imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins (Budapest 1949), 236-7.

Greeks.¹³ Scholarios, on the other hand, although he too claimed that 'we are children of the Hellenes', would not apply the same term to himself because 'I do not believe as the Hellenes believed'.¹⁴ But at Mistra freedom of thought was more readily tolerated than at Constantinople.

Life at Mistra, however, was not free of anxiety. Apart from the wars of the Franks and the growing threat from the Turks, there were other troubles on the horizon: the unruly behaviour of dissident landowners and feuds within the imperial family, especially after the Greeks began to reconquer large areas of the Peloponnese from the Franks. Kydones remarked, in the letter to George the Philosopher about his decision to settle in the Peloponnese, that 'in escaping from the smoke, you seem to have jumped into the fire'.¹⁵ That was about 1363. A quarter of a century later, in 1388, the Turks invaded the peninsula for the first time. They did not stay, but they returned on further raids in 1395 and 1397, and with growing force in the following century.

Gemistos' wish was to be neither more nor less than a philosopher and teacher, but he could not be indifferent to other currents of life in and around Mistra. Apart from the constant threat of armed attack, he was personally concerned by the scandalous conduct of the feudal magnates; all the more so because in course of time he was to become a feudal magnate himself, by favour of the imperial family.¹⁶ The political condition of the Peloponnese was a subject on which he shared the pessimistic outlook of the author of the satirical *Sojourn of Mazaris in Hades*. Presumably the two men must have known each other, since at least part of the *Sojourn* was written in 1415, when Gemistos was certainly at Mistra.¹⁷

Nor could he be indifferent to the monastic communities, whose churches were (as they still are) a conspicuous feature of Mistra's topography. He disapproved of monks in principle, but they were not all idle 'sophists', as he was apt to call them. Some were painting exquisite frescoes in their churches; some were copying manuscripts; a few even studied under Gemistos himself. The monk Gregorios,

¹³ PG 160, 821 B.

¹⁴ Scholarios, iii. 13. 19; 253. 4-5.

¹⁵ Loenertz, op. cit. i. 63. 14.

¹⁶ G. Ostrogorskij, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*, tr. H. Grégoire (Brussels 1954), 181.

¹⁷ Text in J. F. Boissonade, *Anecdota Graeca*, iii (Paris 1831), 112-86; and in *Mazaris' Journey to Hades*, Arethusa Monographs V (Buffalo, NY, 1975). The date is fixed by a letter in the text dated 21 Sept. 1415: Boissonade, 173; *Journey*, 77.

who lauded him at his funeral with classical rhetoric, was not unique at Mistra when Gemistos died. And it is partly to Gregorios that we owe the knowledge of his busy role in the public life of the Despotate.

The paradox of the Despotate at the turn of the century was that it was simultaneously on the brink of destruction and on the brink of total victory over its Frankish invaders, who were now predominantly Italian and Spanish rather than French. Theodore I, who ruled as Despot from 1383 until his death in 1407, more than once despaired of his heritage. He ceded Nauplia and Argos to Venice, and tried to dispose of Monemvasia first to Venice and later to the Knights of St John. He even offered Kalavryta and Mistra itself to the Knights, but his defeatist plan was frustrated by a popular outcry. Corinth, however, was ceded to the Knights in 1400, and remained in their hands for four years. Throughout his reign Theodore was alternately wrangling, fighting, or negotiating for his survival with the Venetians, the Turks, the Navarrese, and even with his own father-in-law, Neri Acciaiuoli, the Florentine Duke of Athens, and his brother-in-law, Carlo Tocco, the Neapolitan Count of Cephallonia.

Theodore's despair was caused as much by his rebellious subjects as by foreign enemies. It was the local magnate, Paul Mamonas of Monemvasia, who instigated the summons of Theodore to Serrai by the Sultan in 1394; and it was the impossibility of controlling him which led to the proposal to cede Monemvasia. Twenty years later Theodore's elder brother, the Emperor Manuel, lamented in his letters the bellicose spirit of the magnates, directed against each other and his government rather than the common enemy.¹⁸

In these circumstances the town of Mistra itself was not safe. It was built as a fortress within a fortress, originally for protection against its former Frankish occupants and the neighbouring Slavonic tribes. Even the houses were designed for individual defence, with arrow-slits on the upper floors and outside wooden steps which could be pulled up in case of attack.¹⁹ There were such attacks, though the upper fortress was never penetrated during Gemistos' lifetime. Mistra was perhaps briefly under siege by the Turks in the 1390s, and again came under attack in 1423. The Franks never gave

¹⁸ Zakythinos, i. 174; Dennis, 146-7, 212-13.

¹⁹ I. P. Medvedev, *Mistra* (Leningrad 1973), 51-2.

up hope of recovering the city which they had been forced to cede in 1261, just as the Greeks never gave up their efforts to restore imperial rule over the whole Peloponnese. Mistra was an uneasy haven.

Gemistos never sought to build himself an ivory tower there. He was a public-spirited man, and bore no resentment for his expulsion from the capital. The scope of his public appointments is uncertain, but it was wide. He was recorded as a member of the Senate in 1438, though that was a sinecure even at Constantinople.²⁰ He regarded himself as competent to reorganize the government and even to take command of the armed forces.²¹ He held an undefined administrative post (*magistratum gerit nescio quem*) according to his Italian friend Francesco Filelfo in 1441.²² He was certainly a judge, for Charitonios' funeral oration claims that both parties to a suit, whether they won or lost, always left the court satisfied by his decisions.²³ It has even been argued, reasonably though not conclusively, that he held the highest of all judicial posts, that of Judge-General.²⁴ His other obituarist, the monk Gregorios, described him as 'protector of the ancestral and common laws', and also as 'protector of the supreme court of the Greeks'.²⁵ These were evidently conventional tributes of esteem, since neither expression corresponds to any specific post.²⁶ Both obituarists emphasized his impeccable knowledge of the law.

He was often consulted by the last three Emperors and the Despots of the Morea. Even when he was not consulted, he offered his advice spontaneously. There survive a dozen specific cases: in connection with the funerals of Theodore I (1409),²⁷ of Cleope Malatesta, wife of Theodore II (1433),²⁸ and of Helen Palaiologina, the widow of Manuel II (1450);²⁹ the advisory addresses to Theodore II (1415 or earlier),³⁰ to Manuel II (1418),³¹ and to the Despot Demetrios (about 1451);³² and other items of correspondence with Manuel II on the fortification of the Isthmus (1415 or 1416),³³ with John VIII (about 1440),³⁴ and with Constantine XI (about 1449)³⁵ on philosophical topics arising from

²⁰ Doukas, 267. 21.

²¹ PG 160, 840 B-C; Lambros, iii. 311.

²² Filelfo, *Epistole* (Paris 1503?), p. lvij; Alexandre, p. xx n. 1.

²³ PG 160, 808 C.

²⁴ Zakythinos, ii. 131; disputed by Nikolaou (1974), 122 n. 1.

²⁵ PG 160, 817 A-B.

²⁶ Mamalakis (1939), 109.

²⁷ PG 156, 175-80.

²⁸ PG 160, 939-52.

²⁹ Ibid. 951-8.

³⁰ Ibid. 841-66.

³¹ Ibid. 821-40.

³² Lambros, iv. 207-10.

³³ Id. iii. 309-12.

³⁴ L. G. Benakis, "Πλήθωνος πρὸς ἠρωτημένα ἄττα ἀποκρίσεις", *Φιλοσοφία*, 4 (1974), 348-59.

³⁵ Scholarios, iv. 118: 'you (Gemistos) sent to our divine monarch a book written in reply to what I previously argued in defence of Aristotle'. Masai (1956), 405-6, shows that the 'monarch' must be Constantine.

Gemistos' controversy with Scholarios. Philosophy was no less important a subject than politics in the minds of Gemistos and his royal correspondents.

In whatever capacity, Gemistos' services were well rewarded. He was the beneficiary of a series of Bulls conferring grants of land (*πρόνοιαι*) from Theodore II (1427), John VIII (1428), Theodore again (1433), Constantine XI (1449), and the Despot Demetrios (1450).³⁶ Whatever the Church may have thought of him, Gemistos' standing with the imperial family remained high. The second Bull of Theodore II called him 'intimate (*οἰκεῖος*) with our majesty' (a formal phrase conveying a quasi-feudal relationship).³⁷ It also extended his territorial privileges to his sons, and the extension was confirmed in the Bull of Constantine.³⁸ These rewards were an expression of trust in his judgement. The clearest and earliest indication of that trust was given by John VIII, who consulted him in about 1426 on the wisdom of attending a Council of Union with the Catholics, and eventually invited him to join the Greek delegation to the Council in 1438.³⁹

The first public occasion with which a published work of Gemistos is known to have been linked was the funeral of Theodore I, the Despot of Mistra. A funeral oration was composed by his brother, the Emperor Manuel II, for which Gemistos wrote what was called a 'Preface' (*προθεωρία*), but was rather a summary.⁴⁰ Theodore I had died at Mistra in 1407, but Manuel's oration was not delivered in that year; nor was it even delivered a year later, when he visited the Peloponnese. He had intended to deliver it in person on the second anniversary of his brother's death, but he was prevented from doing so by the crisis over the Turkish succession, which had led to civil war among the Ottoman claimants to the throne.⁴¹ The speech was therefore read out at last in 1409, on behalf of the Emperor, by the monk Isidore, later Metropolitan of Monemvasia, and a certain Gazis, who

³⁶ Zakythinos, ii. 122-3. For the texts, see Lambros, iv. 104-5 (1427); iii. 331-3 (1428); iv. 106-9 (1433); iv. 19-22 (1449); iv. 192-5 (1450).

³⁷ Lambros, iv. 106.

³⁸ Ostrogorskij, op. cit. 184, assumes the existence of another Bull of Theodore II (not extant) in 1437. He appears to have overlooked the Bull of 1433.

³⁹ Syropoulos, vi. 19.

⁴⁰ PG 156, 181-308 (Manuel's Oration); 175-80 (Gemistos' *προθεωρία*). The latter also in Lambros, iii. 3-7; both in *Manuel Palaeologus, Funeral Oration on his brother Theodore*, ed. J. Chrysostomides (Thessaloniki 1985).

⁴¹ J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1969), 525-7; Dennis, 158-60.

shared the lengthy task.⁴² If the identification of Isidore with the future Metropolitan of Kiev is correct, then the latter certainly had an early acquaintance with Gemistos, who was present at the ceremony, though it remains doubtful that he was Gemistos' pupil. Gemistos' role was to summarize the very long text; and his summary was eulogized in its turn by a monk called Ioasaph.⁴³

Although the term *προθεωρία* implies a preface or preliminary speech, it hardly seems possible that Gemistos' text was delivered on the same occasion as the Emperor's, still less in advance of it. It has the character of a summary report after the event. At one point it describes an interlude in the Emperor's oration, in the manner of an eye-witness's report.⁴⁴ But it seems almost equally improbable that Gemistos' summary was delivered after the imperial oration, for there would be no point in summarizing what the audience had just heard. So it must have been written for some different and later purpose.

A possible explanation can be found in the great value which the Emperor personally attached to his oration. He sent copies of it to a number of friends, among them Manuel Chrysoloras and his Italian pupil Guarino of Verona, both of whom were prominent in promoting Greek studies in Italy.⁴⁵ To Guarino the Emperor suggested that he might translate the text into Latin, but there is no evidence that this was done. Manuel added apologetically that his oration 'was actually not composed with the idea of currying favour with everybody and practically clamouring to be read: it was meant to be addressed first to him for whom it was really composed, and then to the best of our friends'.⁴⁶ Since it was immensely long, it is a reasonable assumption that not every friend received the full text. Gemistos' abridged version may therefore have been prepared for the less favoured recipients.

It is of minor importance in Gemistos' literary biography, since it was merely an abridgement of another man's work. But a brief account of it will help to show the state of the Peloponnese when Gemistos first went to settle there. The following summary of the *προθεωρία* amounts to barely a tenth of Gemistos' text, which in turn was itself less than a twentieth of the original.

⁴² D. A. Zakythinos, *Μανουήλ Β' ὁ Παλαιολόγος καὶ ὁ Καρδινάλιος Ἰσίδωρος ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ* (Athens 1955), 3-6. Lambros, iii, p. β', mistakenly identified Gazis as Theodore Gazis.

⁴³ Zakythinos, *op. cit.* 20-5; Lambros, iii. 8.

⁴⁴ PG 156, 180 B; Lambros, iii. 7.

⁴⁵ Dennis, 158-60 (Chrysoloras), 166-9 (Guarino).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 166-7.

The most divine king, he wrote, speaks briefly of his brother's native land and descent. He goes on to his brother's noble deeds, at length because they were many. He describes his upbringing and character; then his honourable conduct towards their father (John V) and his family when they were in trouble. He speaks of his brother's first arrival in the Peloponnese and his warm welcome there. He takes care not to say anything detrimental about their uncle and cousin.⁴⁷ He describes the migration of the Illyrians (Albanians) to the Peloponnese, and the doubts whether they should be allowed to settle there, which Theodore overruled. Theodore in fact made use of them as soldiers, and thus strengthened his dominion.⁴⁸ The Emperor then turns to the wars against the Turks.

In describing how some of Theodore's men deserted to the Turks, the Emperor discreetly omits their names. He then describes the intrigues of the 'Barbarian' (Sultan Bayezit I) encouraged by some of the deserters. Next he speaks of the reluctant visit, under duress, of Theodore and himself to the Barbarian's camp at Serrai (1394).⁴⁹ He himself was allowed to return to Constantinople, but Theodore was detained. Later Theodore 'courageously and ingeniously' escaped back to the Peloponnese.⁵⁰ Then the Barbarian sent a powerful force against him, but Theodore with a smaller force frustrated his invasion of the Peloponnese by skilful strategy (1395-7). There followed a general war involving both Christians and other barbarians, in which the Peloponnese suffered severely.⁵¹

The Emperor had therefore decided to go to the West himself to seek help. First he entrusted Corinth to the Knights Hospitallers (1399-1400), and later he decided to hand over the whole province to them; but afterwards, when the situation was stabilized, he recovered it without doing them any injury (1404).⁵² He thinks it right to record these facts in order to forestall misunderstanding or slander. Then he proceeds to compare Theodore's virtues with those of the ancient Greeks. He refers to his brother's illness and the courage with which he endured it.⁵³

⁴⁷ PG 156, 177 A; Lambros, iii. 5. 12-15. On the dispute over the succession with Theodore's uncle (Manuel Cantacuzene) and cousin, see Zakythinos, i. 116-18, ii. 80-1.

⁴⁸ PG 156, 177 A-B; Lambros, iii. 5. 15-18.

⁴⁹ The dates, here and elsewhere in the text, are supplied, not being given by Gemistos.

⁵⁰ PG 156, 177 C; Lambros, iii. 5. 31-6. 1.

⁵¹ PG 156, 177 C-D; Lambros, iii. 6. 4-12.

⁵² PG 156, 177 D-80 A; Lambros, iii. 6. 12-22. For details of the Emperor's journey to the West, see Nicol, 322-6.

⁵³ PG 156, 180 A-B; Lambros, iii. 6-7.

After an interlude to give those present an opportunity to speak of the benefits they had received from Theodore, the Emperor resumes his lament.⁵⁴ He has paused both to rest his voice and to hear his brother's praises from others. (This was a stroke of Gemistos' imagination, for the Emperor did not deliver the oration himself.) Then he begins his introduction again, as if he had been unable to touch on his narrative before the lamentation. Finally he ends with words of consolation, using laudatory terms which neither exceed what is reasonable nor fall short of what is proper.⁵⁵

The portrait of Theodore is of course idealized. His loyalty to his father is not in question; nor is his courage and ingenuity in escaping from Ottoman custody. But his military prowess and statesmanship are greatly exaggerated. Manuel avoided mentioning his two attempts to sell Monemvasia to the Venetians (1384 and 1394); his short-lived alliance with the Turks against the Venetians (1391); and his crushing defeats by the Turks in the campaigns of 1395-7, when they broke through the fortified wall across the Isthmus (the Hexamilion), captured and sacked Argos, and perhaps penetrated even the lower walls of Mistra for a short time. Less flattering historians leave no doubt that Theodore was incapable of controlling the territorial magnates of the Peloponnese, whom the speech alluded to as 'deserters'. He was also more than once compelled to give way to popular movements of disapproval—for instance, in his attempts to cede Monemvasia to the Venetians and Mistra itself to the Knights Hospitallers in 1400. His military successes were won mainly against the Navarrese, though he also had a diplomatic success in acquiring Corinth from his brother-in-law, Carlo Tocco, the Count of Cephallonia, in 1394.

Gemistos necessarily followed his master in making the most of the long but rather undistinguished reign of the late Despot, which had been an unceasing struggle against adverse circumstances. The remarkable recovery of the fortunes of the Despotate, which coincided with the last half-century of the Empire, had scarcely begun. But the event which made it possible—the defeat of Bayezit by Timur-i-lenk in 1402—had already occurred in Theodore's lifetime. A leading part in the recovery which followed was to be played by Manuel's other sons, particularly Constantine (1404-53), the last Emperor. But he was still an infant when his uncle Theodore died. It was Manuel's second son,

⁵⁴ PG 156, 180 B; Lambros, iii. 7. 2-5.

⁵⁵ PG 156, 180 C; Lambros, iii. 7. 10-17.

another Theodore, who was invested as Despot, although himself still a child. There is no evidence that the education of Theodore II was at any stage entrusted to Gemistos, though presumably he felt some influence from the eminent philosopher in the small court of Mistra.

The time came, naturally enough, when Gemistos made a conscious effort to influence the young ruler. The exact date of his *Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore on the Peloponnese* is disputed. It has been variously assigned to a date within a decade from Theodore's accession (between 1407 and 1415) by Masai, and as late as 1423 by Zakythinos.⁵⁶ If the latter date were accepted, the *Address to Theodore* would be later than its companion-piece, the *Address to the Emperor Emmanuel on affairs in the Peloponnese*, which is convincingly dated on internal evidence not later than 1418.⁵⁷ The two *Addresses* are in fact printed in that order in the earliest editions. Similarly in the *Patrologia Graeca* the *Address to Manuel* is printed as *Oratio I* and the *Address to Theodore* as *Oratio II*.⁵⁸ But internal evidence—in particular, a reference in the *Address to Manuel* to an argument which has been 'already demonstrated in a similar kind of address to your most divine sons'⁵⁹—suggests that the *Address to Theodore* is the earlier. (The plural 'sons' need not be an obstacle to this inference, since the *Address to Theodore* does indeed include the argument in question.) This, then, is the order in which the two addresses should be examined.

The *Address to Theodore* starts from constitutional first principles. Just as it is best to have a single captain of a ship or a single general of an army, so too 'monarchy is the safest and most beneficial system'.⁶⁰ But others in the ship or the army may offer advice, which may be accepted or rejected 'politely and without offensiveness'. The same applies in the state when it is in danger.⁶¹

You, Theodore, he continues, have received total responsibility, which no one disputes, from many royal ancestors and from your father. Today we have many enemies, both of our own race and barbarians. Among the latter, our immediate neighbours have seized most of our cherished territory; and being Parapamisadai,⁶² whom

⁵⁶ Masai (1956), 387-8; Zakythinos, i. 176.

⁵⁷ Masai (1956), 387.

⁵⁸ PG 160, 821-40, and Lambros, iii. 246-65 (*Address to Manuel*); PG 160, 841-66, and Lambros, iv. 113-35 (*Address to Theodore*).

⁵⁹ PG 160, 840 c; Lambros, iii. 265. 18-20.

⁶⁰ PG 160, 841 A; Lambros, iv. 114. 2-3.

⁶¹ PG 160, 841 B; Lambros, iv. 114. 3-11.

⁶² The name of a Central Asian people in ancient times, used for the Turks.

Alexander defeated on his way to India, and being now much stronger than us, they seek their revenge on us Hellenes. So I (Gemistos) think it proper to offer my advice, and hope you will forgive me if it is disagreeable. I am like a doctor prescribing beneficial but unpleasant medicine, rather than a cook offering you sweetmeats.⁶³

Past examples show that it is possible to recover from disasters. The Trojans under Aeneas settled in Italy and later founded Rome, together with the Sabines, who were Lacedaemonians. The Persians recovered from their subjection under Alexander, after the Romans had destroyed the Macedonian power. Later, through the Parthians, they exacted tribute from the Romans. So we must not despair; we must discover how to ensure our security. All depends on getting right the political system (*πολιτεία*). 'For there is no other cause of cities faring well or badly except the establishment of a good or bad political system.' Even a good system is not stable and can be easily upset.⁶⁴

There follows an excursus on the political history of Greece and Rome. It begins with Herakles ('the first constitutional reformer among the Hellenes') and proceeds through the Spartan Lycurgus and the Theban Epaminondas to Philip and Alexander of Macedon. Particular stress is laid on the experience of Sparta.⁶⁵ The decline of the Spartans is attributed to such developments as the neglect of the infantry in favour of the navy, and the poor state of the cavalry. Only the rich kept horses, and instead of fighting in person they handed over their horses in time of war to their allies, whom they also treated in a high-handed way. It is emphasized that Epaminondas was a student of Pythagoreanism, Philip was a pupil of Epaminondas, and Alexander was educated by Philip and Aristotle.⁶⁶

When Rome's turn came, the decline set in with the change of institutions (*τὰ καθεστῶτα*). After that the Saracens rose to power as a result of introducing political changes, and they defeated the Romans in North Africa and Persia. Then other races became powerful, also as a result of introducing political changes, most notably the Turks. All these examples point to the need for us too to rectify our political system. Such a system is composed of many elements, and it is necessary to get most of them right, or at any rate the most important of them.⁶⁷

⁶³ PG 160, 841 C-4 B; Lambros, iv. 114-15.

⁶⁴ PG 160, 844 C-5 A; Lambros, iv. 115-16.

⁶⁵ Gemistos makes no mention of Athens. He presumably took the view expressed by some in classical times that the Athenians were less truly Hellenes than the Spartans. On this subject, see Herodotus, i. 56-7; Thucydides, i. 2-3.

⁶⁶ PG 160, 845 B-C; Lambros, iv. 117. ⁶⁷ PG 160, 845 D-8 B; Lambros, iv. 117-18.

Of the three possible systems (monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy), most right-minded people prefer monarchy 'with the best advisers and sound laws, and these to be sovereign'.⁶⁸ A moderate number of well-educated advisers is recommended. The mass of the population is unfitted to vote reasonably, whereas a narrow circle of advisers will act selfishly. A moderate number drawn from the middle classes, neither rich nor poor but well educated, will have different points of view and will arrive at the best consensus on the common good, whereas both the rich and the poor will consider only their own interests.⁶⁹

The laws must prescribe the functions of 'each of the divisions and groups (*μερῶν καὶ ἔθνῶν*)' making up the population, and forbid each to depart from those functions. The three divisions are the manual workers (including farmers, shepherds and 'all those who by their own labour produce fruit from the earth'); the suppliers of services (including merchants, brokers, retailers, and those who provide equipment, buy produce, or on occasion hire themselves out as manual workers); and the ruling class, with the monarch at its head (including judges, officials, the armed forces, and their leaders, who have to be supported by taxation levied on the working classes).⁷⁰

These three divisions must not be allowed to trespass on each other's functions. The law must forbid officials to engage in trade or other 'illiberal business'. The productive class must pay taxes to support the forces and officials, who will be exempt from taxation. The greater part of the army must consist of citizens, not foreigners, since mercenaries are generally unreliable. Most of the workers, who constitute the army's reserves, should be grouped in pairs, each alternating between military service and manual labour. Infantry and cavalry should have separate commanders. No attempt should be made to maintain a navy as well as an army, since that will weaken both. It is wiser to trust the army under good leaders than 'the methods of shipmasters (*ναυκλήρων*) and suchlike inferior people'. It is also better to seek to control neighbouring territory than territory at a distance. War should therefore be avoided except across land frontiers.⁷¹

Taxation can take three forms: first, forced labour; second, a fixed

⁶⁸ PG 160, 848 B-C; Lambros, iv. 118. 24-119. 4.

⁶⁹ PG 160, 848 C-D; Lambros, iv. 119.

⁷⁰ PG 160, 848 D-9 C; Lambros, iv. 119-20.

⁷¹ PG 160, 849 C-52 B; Lambros, iv. 121-2.

payment in cash or kind; third, a percentage of production. The first is the harshest and the most troublesome to enforce. The second is also unjust because it is not related to capacity to pay. The third is the best, both for the individual and for the state, and this should therefore be adopted. On this basis, the state revenue can be divided into three parts, corresponding to the three requirements of agricultural production, which are: first, agricultural workers; second, the providers of resources (cattle, flocks, vines, etc.); thirdly, protection (rulers, military commanders, officials). One-third of the proceeds of production should go to each. But workers who also provide their own means of production should be allowed to cultivate as much land as they wish, and to retain two-thirds of the produce (one-third for their own maintenance as workers and one-third for their share as providers of capital). They should be exempt from any other taxation or compulsory service.⁷²

No luxurious style of living should be allowed, least of all to the ruling class. The latter must be dedicated to warfare and the care of military equipment, which will be inadequate in scale and quality if other expenditure is allowed. No foreign clothing should be imported. Agricultural produce should only be exported subject to 50 per cent taxation if exported to other foreigners. But an exception should be made if the exports are in return for imports of iron or weapons, in which case no tax should be payable. No debased or foreign currency should be used.⁷³

No unusual or barbarous punishments should be inflicted: the purpose should be reform. But if a criminal is beyond reform, 'it is better to deprive him of life and release his soul from his body' than to inflict mutilation and leave him a useless burden on the state.⁷⁴

The most important legislation concerns matters of religion. Three dogmas should be established by law: first, that there exists a pre-eminent deity; second, that the deity exercises care over mankind and that all human affairs, great and small, are regulated by it; third, that it 'regulates all things rightly in accordance with its own judgment, and is not to be diverted from its duty in any circumstances, nor cajoled nor deflected by men's oblations or anything else whatever, since it has no need of mankind'. So religious ceremonies should be simple, being merely 'symbols of recognition that all our benefits come from

⁷² PG 160, 852 C-3 B; Lambros, iv. 122-3.

⁷³ PG 160, 853 B-C; Lambros, iv. 124.

⁷⁴ PG 160, 853 C; Lambros, iv. 124. 24-125. 2.

thence'. This is sufficient to secure virtue and attention to what is good: anything more is impiety.⁷⁵

Contrary opinions on this subject are a source of evil: for example, if they hold that the deity does not exist; or that it exists but is unconcerned with human affairs; or that it exists and is concerned, but can be deflected. The contrast between such views is absolute: from the one follows the good life, from the other follows hedonism. For man's is a composite nature, part divine and part mortal, 'as is agreed by all, Greeks and barbarians alike, who possess the smallest intelligence'. Those who follow the dictates of the divine part will be good and do good; those who are 'in the grip of the mortal and bestial part' will cause all kinds of evil, living for pleasure, which in some cases means glory and in others money.⁷⁶

These principles were followed, for example, by Herakles, Lycurgus, Alexander, and Cyrus. They were neglected by Paris in choosing Aphrodite rather than Hera or Athena, and in abducting Helen; and similarly by Sardanapalus and Nero. Both rulers and subjects have shown the same weaknesses, especially when gold and silver have made their appearance. These always lead to corruption, for the state needs not only good laws but also their enforcement by virtuous rulers; and that follows principally from the three rules of religious belief which have been stated.⁷⁷

Now our only hope is the salvage of what remains of the mighty Roman Empire, that is to say 'two cities in Thrace⁷⁸ and the Peloponnese, but not even the whole of the latter; and such small islands as survive'.⁷⁹ Salvation can only come from a sound political system and good rulers. The worse our position is, the greater the need for political reform. Nor is it difficult, for all depends on one soul—your own.

If God inspires in you the will to achieve something great and fine, it is not difficult, and we shall be saved. The greatest and finest achievement would be to save the race and secure the kingdom by its own resources, which can only be done by establishing such a political system as I have described. You will easily find helpers, who require only two qualifications: the desire for what is good and hatred of wrongdoers. You must start by choosing and consulting them, and

⁷⁵ PG 160, 853 D-6 A; Lambros, iv. 125.

⁷⁶ PG 160, 856 B-C; Lambros iv. 126.

⁷⁷ PG 160, 856 C-7 D; Lambros, iv. 127-8.

⁷⁸ Selymbria and Mesembria.

⁷⁹ PG 160, 860 A; Lambros, iv. 129. 13-17.

telling them that we are in great danger and that radical reform is our only hope.⁸⁰

Next you need to purge the army, dividing the population into soldiers and taxpayers, since the two functions cannot be combined. We can only survive by defeating our enemies, and they will only be defeated by an army which is psychologically sound and has high morale. Mercenaries will fulfil neither qualification. Similarly the ruling class must be purged of merchants, and they must not be allowed to perform service functions. Merchants should only be promoted to the ruling class if they give up trade. Nor should soldiers be mixed up with helots,⁸¹ which is bad for the state. 'We do not use donkeys to do the job of thoroughbred horses, nor vice versa; in fact, I suppose, we do not even use horses for all the same tasks, but some specifically as cavalry chargers and some as draught-horses. All the more should we make the same distinctions in the case of men, and not confuse them.'⁸²

All taxation should be abolished except the tax of one-third on production. You can have as many helots as you like in your household, and allocate as many as you wish to your officials and senior officers. Each of them should be required to support an equivalent number of clients or military attendants to save you the expense of maintaining them. Your own resources should be devoted entirely to defence. Monarchs and leaders of any kind ought not to have to meet heavy expenditure on other purposes, since then they lose respect from their enemies and become valueless to their friends.⁸³

One may compare the eagle and the peacock: the former is simple in appearance, the latter is resplendent but commands no respect. It is better to be ready for war and inexpensively dressed than to wear golden robes and live in dread of your enemies. Or one may compare the way of a shepherd, who will feed a guard-dog from his produce rather than waste it on keeping Maltese whelps, or other useless and voracious animals such as foxes or bears, 'like one or two of those you are now keeping, who flatter and deceive you, with their mouths wide open to swallow everything at a gulp, quite unable to restrain their greed'.⁸⁴

If you wish to succeed, you should adopt this new course at once,

⁸⁰ PG 160, 860 B-1 A; Lambros, iv. 130-1.

⁸¹ Manual workers or servants, called after the *εἰλωτες* of ancient Sparta.

⁸² PG 160, 861 A-C; Lambros, iv. 131-2.

⁸³ PG 160, 861 C-4 A; Lambros, iv. 132-3.

⁸⁴ PG 160, 864 C; Lambros, iv. 133-4.

regardless of the earlier opinions of yourself or your predecessors. Even doctors sometimes have to change their treatment, to the point of amputating limbs for the benefit of the body as a whole. Some decisions you can take yourself; for others you will have to seek authority from your father, the Emperor. He will readily give his consent when he understands the facts. Just as you will gain greater honour by acting as I suggest, so too the damage will be greater if you fail. There must be no delay or postponement. Hesiod was not mistaken when he said: 'A man who puts off his work is always wrestling with ruin.'⁸⁵

None of Gemistos' proposals was ever put into effect. The Emperor and his sons continued to confront their problems with traditional methods. Taking advantage of the temporary peace with the Turks, after the battle of Ankara, Manuel was able to devote more of his time to the Peloponnese. With the help principally of his eldest son John, he set about the twofold task of reducing the Frankish territory and safeguarding it against future attack by the Turks. His correspondence with western rulers and his embassies to the West had both aims in view. Manuel Chrysoloras, who was now expert in western affairs after several years of teaching Greek at Florence and elsewhere, besides carrying out his diplomatic functions, was sent to the West again in 1407. He went to France and England as well as Italy, and attended the Council of Constance in 1414, where the union of the Churches was once more discussed.

But the political and religious requirements for restoring the unity of Christendom could not be met. The Venetians and other holders of Byzantine territory were not disposed to surrender it. Nor were the western powers in any condition to promise help to the Emperor. Wars between the Italian states were almost continuous. So was the Hundred Years War between France and England: Agincourt was fought while the Council of Constance was in session (1415). The Council itself, although it ended the forty-year-old scandal of two, and eventually three, rival Popes, opened up new and bitter divisions.

By delivering the Czech reformer, John Hus, and his supporter, Jerome of Prague, to be burned at the stake (1415-16), the Council provoked a savage war in Bohemia which lasted more than twenty years. By claiming superiority for Councils over the Pope, and calling for fresh Councils at fixed intervals, the Conciliar Movement started a

⁸⁵ PG 160, 864 C-5 A; Lambros, iv. 134-5; quotation from Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 413.

struggle for power in the Church which lasted until mid-century. The Council did, however, have one happy but quite fortuitous by-product. Poggio Bracciolini, an Italian scholar in the papal delegation, used his leisure while at Constance to search the surrounding monasteries for manuscripts of the Latin classics. Cosimo de' Medici, who was also there, was fired by Poggio's example to take up in later years his own interest in acquiring Greek manuscripts from travellers to the East. Florence, the home of Cosimo and the pupils of Chrysoloras, was already becoming the most important centre of Greek studies in western Europe.

The Council of Constance achieved little else in relations between East and West. The Catholics made it clear to the Greeks that there would be no material help without Union, and Union meant not the reopening of theological debate but the simple implementation of the decree of the Council of Lyon (1274). The only concession was the Pope's consent in 1418 to a number of princely marriages across the barrier between the Churches. John, heir to the Empire, married Sophia of Montferrat (who soon left him); Theodore II married Cleope Malatesta (whose death in 1433 was the occasion of Gemistos' funeral oration); and their four brothers (Andronikos, Constantine, Demetrios, and Thomas) were also allowed to take Latin wives.

Manuel was to return to the subject of Union again, but for the time being he could only rely on his own resources against his enemies. His one considerable province outside Constantinople was the Despotate of the Morea, which he was anxious to restore to cover the entire Peloponnese. But since his main antagonists there were Catholic Franks, it was embarrassing to be at war with them while simultaneously trying to negotiate a reconciliation with the Pope. Once the Council of Constance had proved fruitless, that embarrassment at least was removed and the war was renewed. Manuel set out for the Peloponnese himself in July 1414, visiting Thasos and Thessalonica on the way and arriving in March 1415. He stayed for the greater part of two years, and achieved a moderate success.

He first compelled the Prince of Achaia, the Genoese Centurione Zaccaria, to recognize his suzerainty. Then in 1416 his son John launched a campaign against the Navarrese Company, which was only robbed of success by the diplomatic intervention of Venice. Most important of all, the Emperor rebuilt the Hexamilion, which had been destroyed by the Turks in the course of their campaign in 1397 against Theodore I. Manuel's rebuilding operations (during which an

inscription was discovered recording the original construction of the wall by Justinian in the sixth century) caused great annoyance to the disloyal territorial magnates of the Peloponnese. As Manuel noted in one of his letters, the Hexamilion was 'a veritable noose about their necks'.⁸⁶ They resented also the taxation required to pay for it.

Gemistos, as a patriot and philosopher, responded differently. He regarded the reconstruction as a symbol of the Emperor's will to preserve at least the Peloponnese, if not the rest of the Empire. In two documents of this period, he congratulated the Emperor on his determination, but at the same time he renewed the warnings which he had expressed to Theodore II. The first of the two documents is a letter to Manuel, commonly known as *De Isthmo*, probably written in 1415 or 1416.⁸⁷ The other, known as the *Address to Manuel*, is in the same style as the *Address to Theodore*, and was probably written a year or two later than *De Isthmo*, but not later than 1418.⁸⁸

The letter to the Emperor *De Isthmo* was on familiar lines. The Isthmus and the Peloponnese could not be effectively defended in present circumstances 'if the barbarians attack'. The main reason was the political deterioration of the state, for which neither the rugged country nor strong walls nor personal courage could compensate. The same lesson could be learned from the historical experience of the Spartans, Persians, and Romans. 'Our barbarian enemies' owed their strength to a political system which, however inferior in other respects, was well adapted to military expansion. The only way to offset their advantages would be to devise a new political structure, in which the most important requirement would be to segregate the army from the tax-paying community. In the past it had made sense for the Peloponnesians both to serve in the army and to pay taxes, because campaigns were short and booty was ample. In modern circumstances this was impossible. So soldiers must be set apart, to guard the Isthmus instead of paying taxes. This would ensure that they had higher morale and better equipment.⁸⁹

Nor need it lead to a loss of public revenue. Gemistos himself could undertake to raise a force of six thousand men with no increase in the rate of the household tax. They would serve in rotation, a thousand at

⁸⁶ Dennis, 212-13.

⁸⁷ Lambros, iii. 309-12. He mistakenly identifies the addressee as John VIII.

⁸⁸ PG 160, 821-40. For the date, see Masai (1956), 387-8.

⁸⁹ Lambros, iii. 309-10.

a time, but all of them could be mobilized in an emergency. They would be divided into companies and brigades under captains and brigadiers, or under troop-commanders and colonels in the case of the cavalry, if any. 'I undertake to lead them myself and carry out any necessary duties whenever occasion might from time to time require, if you entrusted me with such a commission.' Apart from the advantages of such a system in terms of efficiency and equipment, there were two others. One was psychological: soldiers would feel that they were defending their own freedom, not serving as helots or slaves to their masters. The second advantage was that of specialization: the present situation was as bad as if one were to use every kind of horse indifferently, without any distinction between draught-horses and cavalry chargers.⁹⁰

The letter ended with a personal appeal to the Emperor to come in person to the Peloponnese (although he had in fact been there not long before). If that were impossible, then he must send the best men he could find to advise his son, the Despot Theodore, 'since most people here refuse to give advice except for their own financial advantage'. Those the Emperor might send should be empowered to enforce their decisions on the spot, without regard to the annoyance of certain people, just as a doctor not only prescribes unpleasant medicines but even amputates and cauterizes limbs if necessary for the health of the rest of the body. Gemistos would always give the best advice he could, and 'pray God to bless whatever choice is made'.⁹¹

Gemistos had named no names in his attacks on the disloyal subjects of Manuel and Theodore, though he significantly prefaced his letter *De Isthmo* with the words: 'The excellent Rhaxes will tell you what I should like you to know', implying that there was a confidential message to be communicated.⁹² That his picture of the state of the Peloponnese was not exaggerated is confirmed by the contemporaneous satire, *The Sojourn of Mazaris in Hades*, in which only the Emperor and the Despot were treated with respect. Like Gemistos, Mazaris praised Manuel for rebuilding the Hexamilion. It has been suggested that the *Sojourn* might have been written expressly to warn Manuel on the occasion of his visit to the Peloponnese.⁹³

The author of the *Sojourn*—perhaps Mazaris himself—was more explicit than Gemistos. He attacked several leading personalities by

⁹⁰ Ibid. 311-12.

⁹¹ Ibid. 312.

⁹² Ibid. 309. 2.

⁹³ L. Bréhier, *Le Monde byzantin* (Paris 1969), iii. 315.

name, warning the Emperor not to trust them. One example was a man he called Mouskaranos, whom he denounced as a Jew, a thief, a Latinophile, and barely capable of speaking Greek.⁹⁴ This man has been identified with Demetrios Skaranos, a trusted friend of the Emperor, who travelled extensively on business between the eastern Mediterranean and Venice. He was indeed a Latinophile, and he became a Catholic convert.⁹⁵ About the time when the *Sojourn* was written, or a little earlier, he entered the Camaldolese monastery near Florence, of which Ambrogio Traversari was Abbot, as an oblate. There he helped Traversari with his translations of the Greek Fathers until his death in 1426. Since Traversari was to play a major role in the Council of Union at Florence in 1439, Skaranos may be regarded as a minor link in the extension of intellectual contacts between East and West. But to the author of the *Sojourn*—if Skaranos and Mouskaranos were identical—he was simply a renegade and a corrupting influence on the Emperor.

Gemistos would not have taken such an extreme view of his conduct, if only because at this date theological questions did not concern him so much as questions of politics. His point of view was most vigorously expressed in the next of his advisory treatises, the *Address to Manuel*. It was wider in scope than the *Address to Theodore*, since it was concerned with the means of salvaging the whole Empire and not merely with the Peloponnese. Nevertheless Gemistos started with the Peloponnese because the Despotate was now more than half the territory of the Empire. It was also the only area where Greek arms were currently enjoying success, which gave him his starting-point. But the *Address to Manuel* was rather shorter than the *Address to Theodore*, because much of the ground had already been covered in the earlier *Address*, which, Gemistos implied, was known to the Emperor.

The *Address to Manuel* begins with congratulations on his sons' victory over Centurione Zaccaria and his Navarrese forces. A better future, 'if God grants it', is in prospect for the Peloponnese. That is why, says Gemistos, I offer my advice. I begin with a few points about the province—not that you have not studied it, but in order to proceed methodically.⁹⁶

First, 'we are Hellenes by descent'. That is proved by our language

⁹⁴ *Mazaris' Journey to Hades*, Arethusa Monographs V (Buffalo, NY, 1975), 46-8.

⁹⁵ Dennis, *op. cit.*, pp. lvii-lx; Geanakoplos, 60, 267.

⁹⁶ PG 160, 821 A-B; Lambros, iii. 246-7.

and culture. The Peloponnese and adjacent islands have been the home of the Hellenes, and of no one else, since time immemorial. Many Greek achievements were initiated from the Peloponnese. For example, Byzantium was founded by the Dorians, who were pre-eminently Peloponnesians; and the Romans, who later developed Byzantium into Constantinople, were related to the Peloponnesians, since the Sabines, who helped in the foundation of Rome, were Lacedaemonians from the Peloponnese.⁹⁷

The Peloponnese has unique advantages in climate, fertility, and security. It is an island, though connected with the mainland, and it has easily fortifiable peaks. You should therefore take care of it as your most valuable possession. Your family showed great energy in recovering territory from the Italians, and you have carried out the important task of fortifying the Isthmus. You must go still further to make these achievements secure. Constantinople itself stands to benefit from the efficient organization of this province. I will explain what needs to be done, after first explaining what is wrong.⁹⁸

Most of the population is engaged in agriculture or pasturage. The same men have to support themselves, to pay taxes, and to serve as soldiers. They have to pay in cash to numerous tax-collectors at frequent intervals. So they try to evade military service, and often desert. Such an army is of little value, as was shown in the recent war. To combine military service with making a living is impossible. The army cannot even support itself from booty, which is taken over by the treasury. Not even the Hexamilion can be defended on this system. We must take advantage of the present period of peace to carry out reforms, which it would be impossible to do at a time of crisis.⁹⁹

It is absurd to tax each household to pay for mercenaries to defend the Isthmus. Taxation is already ruinous, without this extra burden. In any case, mercenaries will be insufficient to man the Hexamilion without reinforcement by our own troops, who are unarmed and untrained. Even if we post selected troops there permanently under our divine prince, we shall still need reserves. We are like sick men hoping to be cured by drugs or amulets, instead of a drastic change in our style of life.¹⁰⁰

First we must divide the population into those who will do military

⁹⁷ PG 160, 821 B-4 B; Lambros, iii. 247-9.

⁹⁸ PG 160, 824 B-5 C; Lambros, iii. 249-51.

⁹⁹ PG 160, 825 C-8 A; Lambros, iii. 251-2.

¹⁰⁰ PG 160, 828 B-C; Lambros, iii. 252-3.

service and those who will pay taxes, each being kept separate according to their natural ability. Those who do military service should be exempt from taxation. Those who pay taxes¹⁰¹ should not do so in small amounts, at frequent intervals, to numerous collectors, but through a single tax, paid in kind, to a single collector, on a scale that will be just and not unbearable. The method should be to divide agricultural produce into three parts: one for the producers (ploughmen, shepherds, manual workers); one for the providers of capital resources (cattle, flocks, vines, etc.); and one for the security forces (soldiers and their commanders, up to and including the Emperor). Each of these classes is dependent on the others, and all are essential to the state.¹⁰²

The produce to be divided will include grain, wine, olives, cotton, sheep, milk, wool, etc. But the producers must retain seed-corn and other necessary replacements. If a producer is also the provider of his own capital resources, he should keep two-thirds of his produce and pay only one-third to the state. If the state provides his capital resources, he should keep only one-third, or an agreed proportion approximating thereto. Anyone who works at co-operative expense should keep half, and none of his partners need pay significantly more in taxation. Workers in general may be called 'helots' since they are to be exempt from military service but to contribute their labour. They should be protected from any further exploitation, such as additional taxes or compulsory labour.¹⁰³

Each infantry soldier should have one helot allocated to him, and each cavalryman should have two, so that the soldiers' military service should not be interrupted by the need to work. It will no doubt be impossible to divide the whole population in exactly the right proportions, so where the men fit for military service exceed the helots, they should be grouped in pairs, each man being alternately a worker and a soldier. It is for the Emperor to decide ('but it is for me to advise') how many helots to allocate to senior officers and officials. I suggest three helots to each, and each of them to furnish one cavalryman, combining the functions of a servant and a soldier. The Emperor should have as many helots as he needs. Priests, having no families, should have as many helots as the average regular soldier.¹⁰⁴

Mention of priests leads to a characteristic tirade against monasti-

¹⁰¹ These words are missing in most manuscripts, but supplied from the manuscript used by Lambros, iii. 254. 2.

¹⁰² PG 160, 828 D-9 B; Lambros, iii. 253-4.

¹⁰³ PG 160, 829 C-D; Lambros, iii. 254-6.

¹⁰⁴ PG 160, 832 A-B; Lambros, iii. 256-7.

cism. 'Those who claim to be philosophers' (the monks) should receive nothing and contribute nothing, but live of their own. Any other arrangement would be neither seemly nor religious. Unlike priests, monks contribute nothing to the state: they live a life apart, concerned only for their own souls. It would be mere superstition to imagine that anything given to them at the expense of others could place God under an obligation. Their present attitude is not even consistent with the intention of their founders, who bade them work and live off their own produce. The harm they do to the state by their idleness and waste would delight our enemies.¹⁰⁵

They have no right to expect to be supported out of gratitude to their predecessors. They do not even see that if anything happened to the state, they would be worse off. Some monks, it is true, have done good works, but they should be satisfied with the honour accruing to them. The state can barely afford its own defence: why should it take on the additional burden of this swarm of drones, some calling themselves 'philosophers' and some doing nothing but claiming a higher standard of living than public officials? It is up to you, the Emperor, to reform all this. 'But I will return from my digression.'¹⁰⁶

It follows from what has been said (before the digression on monasticism) that land should be held in common, 'as is perhaps the natural state of affairs'. Anyone should be allowed to cultivate or build on as much land as he is able and willing to manage. The land should then be his so long as he works it, without payment and without let or hindrance, unless anyone else was working it before him. If he is a helot, he should pay one-third of the produce to the state; if he is a soldier or official, he should have no obligation except to fulfil his service.¹⁰⁷

If these ideas seem revolutionary, it is up to anyone who disagrees to prove them disadvantageous either to the community or to the individual. Their advantages are that they would give access to the land to anyone who wants to work; they would ensure that all the land would be cultivated; they would provide sufficient troops, by a system of rotation, for the defence of the Isthmus and the local fortresses, for resistance to invasion, and for foreign expeditions if necessary; and they would supply all the needs of the imperial household.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ PG 160, 832 C-3 A; Lambros, iii. 257-8.

¹⁰⁶ PG 160, 833 B-C; Lambros, iii. 258-60.

¹⁰⁷ PG 160, 833 D-6 A; Lambros, iii. 260.

¹⁰⁸ PG 160, 836 A-B; Lambros, iii. 260-1.

Other points remain to be settled: among them, penal policy. Capital punishment has fallen into disuse, being replaced by mutilation or even by release on probation. Neither course seems right. Mutilation is barbarous, ugly and inappropriate for Greeks; release without punishment is undesirable. Forced labour in chains, for example at the Hexamilion, would be preferable, and would give relief both to soldiers and to taxpayers.¹⁰⁹

Reforms are also needed in economic policy. Foreign currency should not be used. Taxes should be paid in kind, not in cash, and so should payments out of the treasury. Coinage would then be little used, especially as the Peloponnese needs few imports, apart from iron and weapons, which can be exchanged for cotton. It is absurd to import foreign cloth when we produce wool, flax, silk, and cotton ourselves. We do not need to import wool 'from the Atlantic Ocean', manufactured into clothing 'beyond the Ionian Sea'. To be self-sufficient is preferable, even if foreign cloth seems superior. We must distinguish between necessary and superfluous imports and exports. No taxation should be imposed on necessary imports, but exports should be subject to heavy taxation. This will either discourage exports or produce revenue to finance embassies abroad and other exceptional expenditure.¹¹⁰

These matters, however, are of lower priority than the army and domestic taxation. Unless any better solution can be proposed, my suggestions should be put into effect. In any case, things cannot be left as they are. It would not be difficult to carry out my plans: indeed, there would be much greater difficulty and danger in not doing so. Everything depends on your royal decision. I would willingly carry out the task myself if no one else would undertake it. Only it must not be entrusted to those who are always petitioning you for improper causes. If you show yourself firm and consistent, my plans can be carried out without difficulty. I have already explained them in a similar kind of address to your sons. Now it is for you to decide. 'God grant that you will make a decision which will be universally beneficial and right.'¹¹¹

The interests indicated in these writings—the *Addresses* to Theodore and Manuel, and the letter *De Isthmo*—are strongly political, because they are *pièces d'occasion*. All three appeal to history in advocating

¹⁰⁹ PG 160, 836 C-D; Lambros, iii. 261-2.

¹¹⁰ PG 160, 837 A-D; Lambros, iii. 262-4.

¹¹¹ PG 160, 840 A-C; Lambros, iii. 264-5.

reforms, and in all three the reforms proposed are similar, requiring that the political and economic structure of the state and the system of taxation and military service should be recast. In all three it is stated or implied that the leaders and advisers on whom the Emperor or the Despot relied were unworthy. Special points are made in one or other of the documents but not in all three. The *Address to Theodore* is alone in discounting the need for a navy; *De Isthmo* and the *Address to Manuel* startlingly offer Gemistos' own services as a military commander, although he was probably over sixty and had no military experience; the *Address to Manuel* alone proposes forced labour as a reform of penal policy.

The emphasis on economic reforms also varies between the three documents. All of them propose a new system of taxation, to which the two *Addresses* add a discussion of export-import policy, and the *Address to Manuel* adds a new system of land-tenure. This was not such a revolutionary idea as has sometimes been suggested. A provision similar to that of Gemistos had been legislated by the Emperor Pertinax in AD 193. More significantly, as has been pointed out by Soviet historians, who ought to know, Gemistos' scheme had nothing in common with Communism.¹¹² It was designed to preserve rather than subvert the existing quasi-feudal order.

The most conspicuous feature of the three texts is their patriotic spirit. They point to a nationalist revival, which was Gemistos' favourite theme throughout his life. Nationalism to him meant Hellenism, which he associated particularly with the Peloponnese. The omission of Athens from his consideration is noticeable. Athens had ceased to be part of the Byzantine Empire for two hundred years. Nor did the city fit Gemistos' argument historically, since the city-state had deviated from monarchy to become a republic. He therefore perhaps took advantage of the authority of Herodotus for regarding the Athenians as not originally Hellenic in the same sense as the Spartans.

He exaggerated, however, in claiming to Manuel that the Peloponnese had been 'the home of the Hellenes, and of no one else, since time immemorial'. Apart from the Franks since the thirteenth century, the Peloponnese had been occupied in the seventh century by Slavonic tribes, whose descendants were still living near Mistra in Mount Taygetos; and Albanians had been settled in the Peloponnese by Theodore I, as Gemistos had himself acknowledged in his

¹¹² See for example I. P. Medvedev, *Mistra*, 109.

summary of Manuel's Funeral Oration on his brother. His other claims on behalf of the Hellenes or Dorians were largely fanciful, though it was true that Byzantium had been founded by Megarians, who were Dorian by conquest. On the whole, his premisses were sound enough to sustain patriotic propaganda.

Although his patriotism looked to the past for guidance, its purpose was to secure the future of the nation. In the Middle Ages throughout Europe it was necessary for any innovation in the field of ideas to be disguised as a reversion to the past: otherwise it was open to the charge of heresy. Thus Gemistos' mind was working along the same lines as the humanists of the contemporary Renaissance in Italy, who appealed to Cicero and Virgil as their authorities. A similar movement was afoot even within the Orthodox Church. In Bulgaria, for example, the Patriarch Euthymios of Trnovo in the last quarter of the fourteenth century tried to initiate a literary revolution based on a reversion to the language of the ninth-century missionaries, Cyril and Methodius. Like Gemistos, he saw the regeneration of his people in the guise of an antiquarian movement.

Closely connected with the nationalist propaganda is the moral and religious philosophy underlying Gemistos' writings. Only the *Address to Theodore* deals expressly with theological questions. It is dogmatic in insisting on belief in an omnipotent deity (which is called 'God' only in one conventional phrase). The deity has to be regarded as involved in the affairs of humanity, and as inflexibly just. Gemistos also insists on the Platonic dualism of body and soul, and on the Platonic belief that the strength of the state must rest on sound moral and philosophical foundations. By implication, it is made clear that education is crucial to these foundations, for Gemistos reminds Theodore of the educational links connecting Epaminondas with Pythagoreanism, Philip with Epaminondas, and Alexander with Aristotle.

The two *Addresses* and the letter *De Isthmo* are all that survive to indicate with certainty the direction of Gemistos' intellectual interests in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. So far he had shown no conspicuous originality. Many of his themes were conventional, and can be found in writers of the previous century. The fashion of claiming descent from the Hellenes of antiquity went back more than fifty years to Theodore Metochites and his pupil Nikephoros Gregoras. The impotence of the Emperor and the poor quality of his entourage had been a common theme of Demetrios Kydones, who had foreseen the inevitability of the fall of Constantinople as long ago as 1362.

Earlier still the need for economic reforms had been stressed by Nikephoros Gregoras in his *Βασιλικὸς Λόγος* (*Royal Discourse*). So had the need to dispense with mercenary troops, in Thomas Magistros' treatise on the duties of a king. Nikephoros Blemmydes' *Βασιλικὸς Ἀνδριάς* (*Royal Statue*), addressed to the Emperor Theodore II Laskaris in the thirteenth century, had anticipated Gemistos' description of the ideal ruler in Platonic terms; and Theodore Metochites in the early fourteenth century had anticipated his argument that monarchy in association with the law was the ideal constitution. Most of these notions were commonplaces of Byzantine theory. In politics, Gemistos was a radical conservative rather than a revolutionary.

He gave Byzantine theory a fresh style and impetus, however, which appealed to his younger pupils. Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who studied under Gemistos at Mistra in the 1440s, wrote after the Ottoman conquest looking forward to a day when a Greek king and his successors would unitedly administer their own affairs and form a nation.¹¹³ John Argyropoulos, an admirer but probably not a pupil of Gemistos, addressed John VIII as 'Sun King of Hellas' and urged the last Emperor, Constantine XI, to proclaim himself 'King of the Hellenes'.¹¹⁴ That title did not become a reality until the accession of another Constantine, more than four centuries after Gemistos' death.

Although Gemistos' ideas had no detectable influence on the policies of the Emperor or his sons, he continued to be held in high regard by them personally. Living at Mistra, he was not isolated from the main stream of events, for there were periods when the Peloponnese was more important as a centre of activity than Constantinople itself. As the capital was increasingly threatened, while operations in the Peloponnese became increasingly successful, Manuel and his sons were often in residence at Mistra or campaigning in the neighbourhood.

During the overlap of the reigns of Mehmet I at Adrianople (1413-21) and Manuel II at Constantinople (1391-1425), relations between the Turks and the Greeks were not unfriendly. Manuel had in fact helped Mehmet to secure the Ottoman throne against his brothers. The two rulers had an amicable meeting at Scutari in 1420, for the last time. Mehmet died in 1421 and Manuel was incapacitated by a stroke

¹¹³ Chalkokondyles, i. 2.

¹¹⁴ Sp. Lambros, *Ἀργυροπούλεια* (Athens 1910), 7, 29.

in the following year. Mehmet's son, Murat II, then set about asserting the revival of Ottoman power.

In 1422 he besieged Constantinople, using 'huge cannon' for the first time.¹¹⁵ The attack failed, but it caused consternation among the Greeks. The Despot John, Manuel's eldest son, who had previously led the Greek campaign in the Peloponnese, also directed the defence of Constantinople. He then set out in person for Italy and Hungary to seek western aid, but his mission was fruitless. In 1425, soon after his return, his father died. After his coronation as Emperor, John VIII returned to the Peloponnese in 1426 to resume operations against the Franks. Meanwhile Manuel's second son, Theodore II, the Despot at Mistra, had tried to secure an alliance with the Venetians at the price of ceding Corinth, but the negotiations failed. Manuel's third son, Andronikos, the ruling Despot at Thessalonica, ceded the city to the Venetians in 1423 and took refuge in the Peloponnese. The younger brothers—Constantine, Demetrios, and Thomas—also spent time campaigning in the Peloponnese during the 1420s. Mistra thus became a key centre in the fortunes of the imperial family, and Gemistos had opportunities to know them all well.

War came close to Gemistos when the Turks turned their strength against the Peloponnese in 1423. In a devastating campaign, which went on for several years, they again destroyed the Hexamilion and penetrated far into the southern Peloponnese, reaching even the lower town of Mistra. The antagonism of the Greeks and the Latins was increased by the support given to the Turkish campaign by the Florentine Duke of Athens, Antonio Acciaiuoli.

When the Greeks recovered from the initial shock, it was only against the Latins that they dared to take the initiative. In 1427 they defeated Carlo Tocco, the Italian Count of Cephallonia, both on land and at sea. In 1428 Constantine compelled him to cede Clarentza and other possessions in the Peloponnese. In 1429 Constantine took Patras from the control of its Latin Archbishop, Pandolfo Malatesta, who was absent in Italy at the time. In the same year Thomas acquired the remains of the Principality of Achaia. Constantine and Thomas were associated with Theodore in the Despotate of the Morea from 1428. By that date the whole Peloponnese was again under Byzantine control, except for the four Venetian forts of Argos, Nauplia, Koroni, and Methoni. From 1432, Constantine ruled at Kalavryta and Thomas at Clarentza, while Theodore retained Mistra.

¹¹⁵ Ioannes Cananus, *Διήγησις*, CSHB XXXVIII (Bonn 1838), 461.

The Despots' successes were sealed by dynastic marriages: Constantine with Theodora, a niece of Carlo Tocco, and Thomas with Caterina, daughter of Centurione Zaccaria. With the Emperor John himself and Theodore, four of the six sons of Manuel II now had Italian wives, though John's wife, the ill-favoured and unhappy Sophia of Montferrat, had escaped back to Italy in 1426.

The Greeks looked forward to further conquests, but still only against the Latins. In 1435, on the death of Antonio Acciaiuoli, the Florentine Duke, Constantine sent his faithful commander George Sphrantzes, the future historian, to attempt the seizure of Athens and Thebes. But the expedition failed: the Florentines held Athens, and the Turks instead of the Greeks took Thebes. Meanwhile the Turks had also taken Thessalonica and Ioannina in 1430. They had withdrawn from the Peloponnese, being not yet ready to settle there permanently, though they could do so whenever they wished.

Neither the Frankish wars nor the Turkish threat had any direct effect on Gemistos' peaceful life of scholarship. But the indirect effect of his closer acquaintance with the royal brothers was to increase his stature in their eyes. They might not follow his advice, but they conferred on him significant favours. It was during this period that Theodore II (1427) and John VIII (1428) granted him his territorial privileges in the Peloponnese. The sites were as far apart as Argolis and Lakonia. When these privileges were later confirmed to his two sons, they were defined as including administrative control, hereditary ownership and rights of taxation. Gemistos himself had thus become one of the magnates of the Peloponnese.¹¹⁶

His advice was still sought by the royal family, even if it was not taken. An important occasion was recorded by Sylvester Syropoulos in his *Memoirs* of the Council of Union. Speaking at Ferrara in 1438, according to Syropoulos, Gemistos told his colleagues in the Greek delegation that a dozen years earlier John VIII had broached with him the vital question of union between the eastern and western Churches. The Emperor told Gemistos that he had already sent delegates to discuss the summoning of a Council with the Pope. Delegations had indeed been travelling in both directions on such missions at frequent intervals for a long time. But before deciding to attend a Council himself, John wanted Gemistos' opinion.

¹¹⁶ G. Ostrogorskij, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (Brussels 1954), 180-1; Zakythinos, ii. 199-200.

Syropoulos gives his reply in Gemistos' own words:¹¹⁷

It does not seem to me a good idea for you to go to Italy, nor will it turn out to our advantage, so far as I can see. If the Council takes place, no doubt one could find on reflection many points to demand and get accepted with advantage to ourselves—points which will be found by those whose business it is to consider them. But my immediate comment is as follows. If you go there, it will inevitably be with small numbers confronting very large numbers of them. If, then, you go and take part in a Council unprepared, without careful consideration, they will certainly ensure that a majority vote prevails, and you will therefore be going not to attend a Council but to be put in the dock. So it must first be insisted and accepted that a majority vote does not prevail, but the two sides have equal weight, even if one is very numerous and the other very small. On this condition only should you go and take part in a Council.

Gemistos added that this argument had occurred to him on the spot, and that the Emperor appeared to accept it (although in fact, when the Council took place in 1438-9 the Greeks were heavily outnumbered, and no such agreement on voting had been reached). Nor was this the first time that John had been warned of the dangers of a Council with the Latins. His own father had once advised him to 'go on studying and investigating the project as long as you can, especially when you have need of something to frighten the Turks'.¹¹⁸ But he should be careful never 'really to try to put it into practice', because the Greeks were not psychologically prepared for Union, and the outcome could well be worse than the existing schism.

The reigning Patriarch, Joseph II, and many of the bishops were also opposed to the idea of a Council, at least if it meant going to Italy. But the Emperor, although he took note of the many objections, had concluded from his own earlier visit to Italy that there was no alternative if western aid was to be secured against the Turks. When the die was cast at the end of 1437, however, he took care to have Gemistos in his delegation.

Manuel had followed his own advice in sending and receiving missions to discuss the possibility of a Council, without arriving at any decision. But John meant business. In 1430 he sent an important delegation to Rome, which laid the foundations for what became the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438-9.¹¹⁹ The joint Council would probably have met earlier if Pope Martin V had not died in 1431. He had summoned a Council of the Catholic Church at Basle shortly

¹¹⁷ Syropoulos, vi. 19.

¹¹⁸ Sphrantzes, 320 (Pseudo-Phrantzes).

¹¹⁹ Gill (1959), 42-4.

before his death. But his successor, Eugenius IV, soon became embroiled in a dispute with that Council, which claimed jurisdiction over him. The Conciliar Movement was then at its peak. The Greek Emperor therefore had to choose between two rival authorities in the Western Church with which to negotiate. Several years passed before he was convinced that the Pope rather than the Council of Basle would prevail.

In the meantime, although the Emperor John was ready to reject the negative advice given him by both his father and Gemistos, the latter continued to enjoy royal favour. Another public occasion occurred in 1433, when he was invited to deliver a funeral oration at the graveside of Cleope Malatesta, the wife of the Despot Theodore II. Her burial took place at the Church of the Zöodotos in Mistra, where Constantine's first wife, also an Italian, was already buried. Gemistos' oration was delivered in the presence of Theodore, whom Gemistos addressed in the vocative: 'O Prince most divine over us.'¹²⁰ Cleope's death was also the occasion of other literary tributes, including a poem in twenty-two iambic verses by Gemistos' pupil Bessarion, and further orations by both Bessarion and Nikephoros Cheilas.¹²¹

Cleope Malatesta was one of the Italian princesses who had been allowed to marry into the imperial family by special dispensation of the Pope after the Council of Constance. Apart from Theodore II's marriage with her and John's with Sophia of Montferrat, most such marriages were with the daughters of Italians settled in the East. Constantine, for example, married successively the daughters of a Tocco and a Gattilusio; Thomas married a Zaccaria. The same had happened in the previous generation: Theodore I had married an Acciaiuoli, and John VII a Gattilusio. The marriage of Theodore II and Cleope was therefore part of a fashionable pattern.

It had not been an unhappy marriage, like some of the others, though it was short-lived, for Cleope died young. She was not the first nor the last of her family to be closely linked with the Peloponnese, and more specifically with Mistra. One of her relatives was Pandolfo Malatesta, the Latin Archbishop of Patras. Another was Sigismondo Malatesta, still a boy in 1433, who was to become one of Gemistos' warmest admirers and to play a remarkable role in his fortunes after death. The funeral of Cleope was the first link in a chain which closely bound together the names of Gemistos and Malatesta.

¹²⁰ PG 160, 949 c; Lambros, iv. 174. 9.

¹²¹ Zakythinos, i. 190; Lambros, iv. 154-60 and 176 (Bessarion); iv. 144-52 (Cheilas).

Gemistos characteristically took the opportunity of her funeral to indulge publicly in philosophical speculation. Solon's advice to 'look to the end', he said, should be applied to a man's character as well as his fortune. Many who pursue virtue do so without reasoning, simply following right belief (*δόξα ὀρθή* or 'orthodoxy'). They will not be blamed at the end of their lives for occasional sins committed in ignorance. This was the usual convention in funeral speeches, which Gemistos said he would follow because of the lady's virtues, and 'the reverence and kindness which she always showed me'.¹²² He praised her beauty and character, her intelligence, modesty, gentleness, piety, humanity, and generosity, with many examples. Her modesty was illustrated by the readiness with which she accepted the change from 'the lax and idle way of life in Italy to the austerity and propriety of our habits'. Her piety was illustrated by her adoption of 'our customs of prayer and fasting'. Other remarks confirm that she had been converted to Orthodoxy.¹²³

He turned next to profounder speculations. If there were nothing immortal in man, he said, our grief would be incurable; but we believe that part of man is mortal, part immortal. The latter is the most important and essential part: the mortal part is simply a kind of tunic fitted round it. The casting off of the tunic is not an occasion for grief. She who has died is certainly going to a better life. Death is a journey towards a better prospect. Only the moment of separation is painful, but one must look forward to a reunion in happier circumstances.¹²⁴

It is therefore worth examining the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which is of long standing among men everywhere, as is shown by the custom of paying obsequies to the dead. It is linked with belief in God, and the services offered to God and to the dead are related to each other. Whatever may be doubted, these beliefs cannot be.¹²⁵

Non-rational animals do not understand causation, and therefore have no belief in the deity; nor do they understand infinity, so they do not desire immortality. These things are only possible for man because God has given him a rational soul. God would not have given the power of knowing himself to a nature alien to himself and mortal, only to a kindred nature; for there must be something akin between

¹²² PG 160, 940 A-1 C; Lambros, iv. 164-5.

¹²³ PG 160, 941 B-5 A; Lambros, iv. 165-8.

¹²⁴ PG 160, 945 B-C; Lambros, iv. 169-70.

¹²⁵ PG 160, 945 C-8 C; Lambros, iv. 171-2.

the knower and the known. Nor would God have implanted in man the desire for immortality and then left it unfulfilled and vain.¹²⁶

These arguments are reinforced by observation of the fact of suicide. No non-rational creature commits suicide; nor would man ever do so if he thought he was destroying his soul as well as his body. All these things are reasons for not lamenting the dead.¹²⁷

Gemistos concluded by briefly addressing the Despot Theodore II, urging him to put aside his sorrow and concentrate on the tasks of government in circumstances of great danger.¹²⁸ Theodore would no doubt have recalled the earlier adjuration which Gemistos had addressed to him nearly twenty years ago, and the funeral oration on his uncle whom he had succeeded as a child.

Of Gemistos' surviving compositions, this was the earliest on a religious occasion, since the funeral oration on Theodore I was not Gemistos' work but the Emperor's. It would be interesting to know his hearers' reactions. The style was characteristically philosophical rather than theological. His usual circle would have been accustomed to Gemistos' idiosyncrasies. Bessarion, who must have heard the speech, would not have been surprised. Others who were not present but read it later might have been more sceptical. Mark Eugenikos, another ex-pupil and now an ordained monk, might have reproved the latent strain of Platonism. Scholarios, already suspicious of Gemistos' orthodoxy by his own later account,¹²⁹ would have felt his suspicions confirmed by the peculiar argument on suicide.

The lives and thoughts of these three men were to become intimately linked with those of Gemistos in later years. Bessarion, Eugenikos, and Scholarios all belonged to roughly the same generation. Although the date of birth of none of them is certain, they were probably between forty and fifty years younger than Gemistos. The birth of Mark Eugenikos can probably be placed between 1392 and 1394, Bessarion's between 1400 and 1403, Scholarios' between 1400 and 1405. Alone of the three Scholarios was not in the strict sense a pupil of Gemistos, but he was certainly influenced by the famous philosopher and revered him even when he felt obliged to denounce his heresies. Scholarios differed also from Bessarion and Eugenikos in

¹²⁶ PG 160, 948 C-D; Lambros, iv. 172-3.

¹²⁷ PG 160, 949 A-B; Lambros, iv. 173-4.

¹²⁸ PG 160, 949 C-52 A; Lambros, iv. 174-5.

¹²⁹ Zisis, 113; Scholarios, iv. 155. 30.

pursuing a secular career until he was about fifty years old, although he had wanted to become a monk at least twenty years earlier.¹³⁰

It was as a teacher and administrator that Scholarios first made his reputation. As a young man he took pupils in the usual way, and lectured regularly at Constantinople on language, literature, philosophy, and even theology, though still a layman. He compiled a collection of extracts from Aristotle for his pupils; he mastered Latin and translated works of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. His lectures were attended by members of the imperial family, and so impressed the Emperor John VIII that he was taken into the service of the court. He rose to the rank of Secretary-General (*καθολικὸς σεκρετάριος*), and eventually became a Judge-General (*καθολικὸς κριτής*).¹³¹ The latter was a post also probably held by Gemistos in the Peloponnese.

It has been suggested that the name Scholarios, loosely translated as 'courtier', was adopted by him, or became attached to him, as a result of his appointments at court, and that originally his family name was Kourtesis. But the *schola* (*σχολή*) meant rather the palace guard than the court in general. Scholarios certainly never served in a military capacity. It seems more probable that Scholarios was his family name, and that the name Kourtesis, or Kourtezis, was derived from an Italian translation of Scholarios into *cortese*.¹³² It is significant that the name Kourtesis never appears in Scholarios' autographs, of whatever date, but only at the head of writings attributed to him which show a pro-Latin tendency. These have been taken as evidence that Scholarios at one time supported the Union of the Churches on the terms agreed in 1439. But it has also been argued that they were forged by pro-Unionist Greeks.¹³³

The point is important in the assessment of Scholarios' attitude towards the Union, and therefore also of the attitudes of other Greeks, including Gemistos, towards him. In the form in which the Union was eventually negotiated, it was strongly opposed from first to last by Mark Eugenikos, but it was equally strongly supported by Bessarion. To Gemistos the issue was academic; which is not to say that it was insignificant, only that it was a matter for logical reasoning rather than dogmatic theology.

Scholarios, however, was accused of vacillating on the Union between support and opposition. Some historians have represented

¹³⁰ Scholarios, iv. 464.

¹³¹ Zisis, 110-16.

¹³² Id. 69-72.

¹³³ Id. 358, 390-403.

him as moving to and fro in an opportunist way.¹³⁴ His supposed inconsistencies led Leon Allatios and other scholars to believe that there were two, if not three, men of the same name (Gennadios—this being the name he adopted in about 1450) until, in the epigrammatic phrase of Gibbon, the Abbé Renaudot ‘restored the identity of his person and the duplicity of his character’.¹³⁵ His reputation has remained equivocal, at least outside the Orthodox Church (of which he became Patriarch in 1454), until the present century.

In a recent work by a Greek scholar, it has been suggested that the charge of duplicity against Scholarios, although it goes back to his contemporaries (including Gemistos), is probably unjust.¹³⁶ He never ceased to believe in the Union of the Churches by means of a genuine reconciliation of doctrines, but not on terms of total surrender. Thus Scholarios stood not far apart from the position of Mark Eugenikos, whom he revered as his theological master. He therefore eventually found himself in conflict with Bessarion, who negotiated the terms which amounted to surrender. As for Gemistos, Scholarios wrote to him in 1450 that ‘you were always on the side of the nation and the Church’ in the argument with the Latins;¹³⁷ but he could not ignore the fact, as he wrote to another correspondent after Gemistos’ death, that his obsessive Platonism tended to undermine his Christian faith.¹³⁸

These ultimate consequences were still far off when the consultations which were to lead to the Council of Union began at Constantinople in 1434. Then bishops, monks, and laymen were summoned by the Emperor to advise him.¹³⁹ Mark Eugenikos came reluctantly from his monastery. Scholarios, in his secretarial capacity, played a prominent part in the Emperor’s conference. Bessarion was invited to come from Mistra, where he was studying under Gemistos; and Scholarios took care to tell him—in a letter with no heading, but clearly addressed to Bessarion—that he himself had suggested his name to the Emperor.¹⁴⁰

In the same letter, Scholarios also asked Bessarion to persuade his teacher—again unnamed, but undoubtedly Gemistos—to come to

¹³⁴ Gill (1959), 166-8, 225-6, 366-87; M. Jugie, ‘L’Unionisme de Georges Scholarios’, *Échos d’Orient*, 36 (1937), 65-86. Other examples are cited by Zisis, 54-5.

¹³⁵ E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. R. Bury (7 vols., London 1929), vii. 183 n. 41; E. Renaudot, *De Gennadii vita et scriptis*, in PG 160, 219-312.

¹³⁶ Zisis, 28-59, 139-51.

¹³⁷ Scholarios, iv. 121. 10-11.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 156.

¹³⁹ Syropoulos, ii. 36; iii. 8-9.

¹⁴⁰ Scholarios, iv. 437.

Constantinople for the discussions. It is uncertain whether Gemistos complied. He might justifiably have excused himself on grounds of age. Syropoulos does not mention him among those who advised the Emperor during the preliminary consultations at Constantinople.¹⁴¹

On the other hand, Syropoulos quotes a significant remark made by Gemistos during the Council in Italy. Referring to the question of voting on the matters at issue, Gemistos said that he assumed the method had been settled 'before we left Constantinople'.¹⁴² The natural sense of these words is that Gemistos was one of the party which set out from the capital. The alternative hypothesis, that he joined the delegation when the Emperor passed through the Peloponnese on his way to Navarino, seems less plausible, though it is possible. But if he was at Constantinople for the preliminary discussions, he evidently had little influence on them, and perhaps he did not seriously try.

¹⁴¹ Syropoulos, iii. 8.

¹⁴² Id. vi. 19, last line.

VII

A PROSPECT OF UNION

THE Eastern and Western Churches had grown apart for centuries.¹ Pope Eugenius IV, speaking in 1439, said that the schism had lasted 437 years: in other words, since the year 1002, when the anti-Byzantine western Emperor Henry II succeeded to the throne; though others would have placed the crucial breach in the year 1054, when Cardinal Humbert placed on the altar of St Sophia a papal Bull excommunicating the Patriarch.

Both before and after the schism many differences of ritual, liturgy, dogma, and custom had developed. The Latins used unleavened bread in the Communion service, the Greeks preferred it leavened; they differed over the invocation (*ἐπίκλησις*) of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, and over the doctrine of Purgatory; the Latins held that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son ('filioque'), the Greeks held the Procession to be only from the Father; Greek priests grew beards, the Latins were clean-shaven. These differences of doctrine and practice varied in importance from time to time, but the crucial issue was political. The Greeks needed military help against the Turks as the price of Union. The Latins were divided between supporters of papal supremacy and the Conciliar Movement, each wishing to exploit the opportunity of Union with the Greeks to strengthen their claim to predominance over the reunited Church.

The differences also ran deep in the psychology of eastern and western Europeans. They had mostly ceased to know each other's language since the sixth century. Latins who lived in Greece from the thirteenth century learned demotic Greek, but not the written language, unless they were priests. At the theological level, Greeks and Latins despised each other, as they were taught to do by their churches. At the intellectual level, the Greek sense of superiority was justified until the watershed of the thirteenth century, but not thereafter.

¹ For the background to this chapter, I have relied particularly on the following works: *The Cambridge Medieval History*, iv. 1 (Cambridge 1966), chs. VI-VII, and iv. 2 (Cambridge 1967), ch. XXVI; J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge 1959), and id., *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays* (Oxford 1964).

The material decline of the Byzantine Empire had already begun well before 1204, but it was still a more civilized community than western Europe. It was ruled by men, whether or not they were competent soldiers, who were generally literate and connoisseurs, and often scholars and theologians in their own right, whereas the ruling class in the West had little talent except for war. The western Emperor and the Pope, living in separate capitals, were divided by constant and undignified quarrels, whereas the eastern Emperor and the Patriarch, despite personal rivalry from time to time, lived normally side by side in harmony. At the intellectual level there were great scholars and philosophers in the West as well as the East, but the Greeks had a preponderance of learned laymen.

In the thirteenth century the balance began to shift in favour of the West. It was the century of the enlightened Emperor Frederick II and the Angelic Doctor, St Thomas Aquinas; it was the century in which Dante and Giotto were born. Meanwhile the Byzantine Empire was fatally undermined by the consequences of the Fourth Crusade. This brutal act of Venetian imperialism had the dual effect of driving Franks and Greeks physically together, but at the same time dividing them psychologically even more profoundly than before.

Many attempts were made to heal the breach. The most notable was the agreement on Union of the Churches negotiated at the Council of Lyon in 1274. On the Greek side, it was the work of Michael VIII, the first of the Palaiologos dynasty, who had usurped the throne, recovered Constantinople from the Latins, and deposed a recalcitrant Patriarch. Although his new Patriarch was docile, the lower clergy resisted his policy of Union, which was also repudiated by his son, Andronikos II. For fifty years the matter was dormant. Then, from 1324, emissaries began to travel to and fro again. Emperors and even Patriarchs generally favoured Union; monks and public opinion generally rejected it. The Popes unhelpfully pointed out that Union had been agreed in 1274, so there was nothing more to discuss: all that was necessary was to enforce it.

But many instances of mutual incomprehension and distrust stood in the way of a true union. Two will suffice, one from each side, both from highly educated men of the fourteenth century. Barlaam, the learned Greek monk born in Italy, wrote to Pope Benedict XII: 'A difference of dogma does not so much divide the hearts of the Greeks from you as the hatred of the Latins which has entered into their spirit, as a result of the many great evils which the Greeks have suffered from

the Latins at various times, and are still suffering day by day.² On the other hand, the poet Petrarch, who had tried without success to learn Greek from Barlaam himself, regarded the 'schismatic Greeks' as worse than the Turks. He wrote to the Doge of Genoa in 1352: 'As for the deceitful and futile Greek wretches (*Graeculis*), who are incapable of any bold initiative, . . . I long to see that infamous empire, that seat of heresies, destroyed with your own hands. . . .'³

A change of attitudes, however, was already under way. The teaching of Greek was prescribed at a number of universities—Salamanca, Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon—which were chosen by the Council of Vienne (1312). The effect was still slight, but at least in southern Italy and Sicily, Greek had never died out. On the Byzantine side, scholars began to study Latin again in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Among them were Maximos Planudes, who translated parts of St Augustine and Boethius for the first time, and Demetrios Kydones, who translated Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles* (*Gentiles* being rendered as *Ἕλληνες*). Some of these students of Latin doctrine, like Manuel Moschopoulos and Joseph Bryennios, remained staunchly Orthodox; others, like Manuel Kalekas and John Kyparisiotes, defected to Catholicism. There were several such defections in reaction to the victory of Gregory Palamas in the Hesychast controversy (1351). But conversions in the opposite direction were very rare. They were in fact almost entirely confined to cases of mixed marriage rather than theological conviction.

Kydones was perhaps the most enthusiastic of the Latinophiles in his generation, and therefore to some extent unrepresentative. His comment on his own translations of Catholic philosophy is nevertheless striking: 'I provided those of our people who were competent in philosophy with the means of becoming more so; and as for the jealous ones who criticize the Latins, I made them explode by showing them the quality of what they have the impudence to depreciate.'⁴ It is not surprising that Kydones was among the learned Greeks who ended by being converted to the Catholic faith.

While the Latins reciprocated the renewed readiness of the Greeks for closer relations on the intellectual level, it was chiefly the Greek classics, not Greek theology, which attracted their interest. In the

² PG 151, 1336 B.

³ Francesco Petrarca, *Le Familiari*, iii, ed. V. Rossi (Florence 1937), 120. 85-8 (= xiv. 5. 2).

⁴ G. Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Dimitrio Cidone*, Studi e Testi 56 (Vatican 1931), 364. 45-8.

process of intellectual rapprochement, Florence took the lead. During a visit to Italy in 1397, on one of the many embassies sent to discuss reunion of the Churches, Manuel Chrysoloras accepted an invitation to become professor of Greek at the Florentine *Studio*, the University founded seventy-five years earlier. He was not the first Greek to teach his language in Italy, but the establishment of what was in effect a chair of Greek was a major event. A whole generation of young Florentines and other Italians was attracted by his fame. Some of them lived long enough to attend the Council of Union when it finally met forty years later.

The new attitude of Latin humanists towards the Greeks was illustrated by the number of young travellers in Greece during the early decades of the fifteenth century, many of them in quest of Greek education or in search of Greek manuscripts. Among them were Iacopo di Agnolo dalla Scarperia, the first Florentine to go to Constantinople to learn Greek; Giovanni Aurispa, who served as secretary to the future Emperor John VIII, and brought back a huge collection of manuscripts from Greece; Cristoforo Buondelmonti, who travelled widely in the Greek islands and prepared maps of several among them; Cyriac of Ancona, who studied Greek at Constantinople and twice visited Athens and the Peloponnese; Francesco Filelfo, who became friendly with the future Emperor Constantine XI and the future Patriarch Gennadios (George Scholarios) while studying at Constantinople, and married a great-niece of Manuel Chrysoloras; Guarino of Verona, the friend of Manuel II, who collected Greek manuscripts and translated many of them into Latin; Giovanni Tortelli, who was travelling in Greece in 1437 when he was recalled to serve at the Council of Union; Sassuolo of Prato, who consulted Filelfo on places in Greece worth visiting in 1441; and many others.⁵

But in almost all cases their interest was directed only to Greek antiquity. Few in the West showed any serious interest in Greek theology or in the possibility of a resurgence of the Byzantine Empire as a political, military, or economic power. One of the few ecclesiastical scholars in Italy who studied the Greek patristic texts was Ambrogio Traversari, the Abbot of the Camaldolese monastery; and he was also a competent Platonist. He had not studied at Constanti-

⁵ For details of those named, see the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome 1960-); J. A. Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy*, ii: *The Revival of Learning* (London 1897); J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (New York 1958); R. Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford 1969).

nople, nor even under Chrysoloras at Florence, but his knowledge of Greek was to play an important role in the Council of Union, and he treated the Greeks (particularly Scholarios) with respect and friendliness. But he was a rare exception. Most of the Latins shared the contemptuous opinions of the Greeks expressed by Petrarch, save only for their usefulness as purveyors of the ancient classics.

Perceptive Greeks recognized this melancholy fact. 'The Latins criticize and despise us', wrote George Sphrantzes some years later, when he had settled in Latin territory after the fall of Constantinople.⁶ Even the humanist Popes of the fifteenth century, such as Nicholas V (Tommaso Parentucelli) and Pius II (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini), were interested only in the educational value of the Greek classics, not in Greek theology. If they dreamed of rescuing the Greeks from slavery under the Turks, it was to redeem them from heresy, not to treat them as equals. Sphrantzes' judgement was correct, and it had been so for a long time already. This was the uneasy atmosphere in which a final attempt was made in the 1430s to devise a formula of unity. It had been preceded by close on thirty such attempts in the past four centuries.

Opinions differ whether the initiative which led to the Council was taken by the Emperor or the Pope. John VIII had been disappointed by the failure of his personal visit to the West in 1423, and Gemistos had warned him against renewing it in 1426. But in the latter year the Pope sent Andrew Chrysoberges, one of three Greek brothers who had all become Dominicans, on an exploratory mission to Constantinople. He stayed there for two years, with little result. Then in 1430 John sent an important embassy to Pope Martin V, which reached agreement in principle on the terms for a Council of Union. Before the Council could meet, the Pope died in 1431; but his successor, Eugenius IV, who claimed to have influenced Martin in favour of a Council, confirmed the intention.⁷

Union with the Greeks was not, however, the only matter on the agenda. It had been decided at the Council of Constance (1414-18) that Councils should be held at fixed intervals, and one was due in any case in 1431. The Conciliar Movement, which had imposed this requirement on the papacy in the process of ending the scandal of the Great Schism, regarded it as a means of subordinating and controlling the

⁶ Sphrantzes, 458. 20 (Pseudo-Phrantzes).

⁷ J. Gill, *Eugenius IV, Pope of Christian Union* (London 1961), 36.

Pope. Eugenius naturally did not accept this interpretation. But his position was weak at the beginning of his reign. He was actually driven out of Rome in 1434 by riotous mobs, inspired by his Italian enemies—particularly the King of Naples and the Duke of Milan—and took refuge in Florence until 1443.

For years he had to exercise great caution in dealing with the Cardinals who led the Conciliar Movement. Although he confirmed his predecessor's decision to convene the Council at Basle in 1431, he appointed as president a man who he hoped would be loyal to himself, Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini. In the end his judgement was vindicated, but only after six years of anxiety.

During its first five years of activity, power oscillated between the Council and the Pope. In November 1431 the Pope issued a Bull purporting to adjourn the Council at Basle and to transfer its sessions to Bologna in eighteen months' time. The Council reacted angrily. All but six of the twenty-one Cardinals repudiated Eugenius, claiming that his election as Pope had been invalid. Not merely did the Council continue in session: in December 1432 it passed a series of decrees asserting its superiority over the Pope, who soon afterwards embarked nervously on a retreat. In August 1433 he offered concessions to the Council, which were rejected; and in December he made an almost complete surrender by withdrawing the Bull of 1431. During the following two years, especially after his escape from Rome in June 1434, he veered between seeking a reconciliation with the Council and further efforts to reimpose his authority on it.

While the western Church was struggling to restore its own unity, it was also trying to carry on the business for which the Council had been convened. The question of reunion with the eastern Churches was high on the agenda, both for the Pope and for the rebellious Council. Numerous envoys travelled between Basle and Constantinople, between Constantinople and the Pope (whether in Rome or in Florence), as well as between the Pope and Basle. But until 1436 the principal matter for discussion at the Council in its opening phase was the defection of the Czech followers of John Hus, whom the Council of Constance had treacherously delivered to be burned at the stake in 1415. War was still in progress between the imperial forces and the Hussites. The latter won a notable victory in 1431 while the Council was actually assembling at Basle; and Cardinal Cesarini, who was in control of the imperial army, narrowly escaped with his life. The Council was opened in his absence by John Stojković of Ragusa,

a learned Bulgarian priest, in July 1431. Cesarini did not arrive in Basle till September. The Council's labours then continued for eighteen years.

Although the Council succeeded, after much bloodshed and bitterness, in arriving at a compromise with the Hussites in 1436, this was no more than a side issue. The central question remained: whether the Pope or the Council was to be supreme in the Church. The Pope sought to strengthen his position by entering into compacts with the rulers of the national states: in the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges with the King of France (1438) and in a similar treaty with the German princes at Mainz (1439). Negotiations with the Greeks were conducted in competition by the Pope in Florence and the Council at Basle as part of the same struggle for supremacy. If the Greeks could be persuaded to come to Basle, or to another location dominated by the Council, it would be a triumph for the Conciliar Movement. If they could be attracted to Florence or another location under papal control, it would be Eugenius who could claim to have restored the unity of Christendom.

It was the tacit assumption of both parties that Union was sure to follow. Each asserted its dogmatic supremacy in ways which took this for granted, with little consideration for the feelings of the Greeks. In its decree inviting the Greeks to Basle in 1435, the Council declared that it had 'corrected the new heresy of the Bohemians', and intended next to 'correct the old heresy of the Greeks'. This naturally caused offence in Constantinople.⁸ The Greeks were also alarmed by a phrase in the decree which implied that the costs of their return from the Council would only be defrayed if the Union had first been achieved.⁹

The Pope was almost equally arrogant and discouraging. He demanded as a preliminary that the Greeks should restore Patras to the control of his Archbishop, from whom the Despot Constantine had taken it.¹⁰ He referred to the Greeks as *Graeci*, which they found insulting.¹¹ His legates demanded precedence over the Patriarch of Constantinople.¹² Later it was made clear, when the time came for them to meet, that the Patriarch would be expected to prostrate himself and kiss the Pope's foot, like everyone else; but this demand was eventually dropped.¹³ For the rest, the Emperor was alone in regarding these matters as unimportant.¹⁴ He tried to assuage his

⁸ Syropoulos, ii. 34.

⁹ Id. ii. 41.

¹⁰ Id. ii. 20.

¹¹ Id. ii. 21.

¹² Id. ii. 24.

¹³ Id. iv. 30-3.

¹⁴ Id. ii. 21, 33, 43.

compatriots' resentment, thus showing them that he was determined to secure Union at almost any price.

The Patriarch and his bishops, on the other hand, hesitated long and anxiously.¹⁵ Partly they feared humiliation; partly they wanted to wait and see which of the rival hosts would prevail, for a Council without the Pope seemed nugatory. Of the Emperor's advisers, Mark Eugenikos was entirely hostile to the project, and Scholarios favoured it only if there was to be a genuine debate, arriving at a conclusion binding on both parties.¹⁶ This was impossible until the quarrel between the Pope and the Council had been ended, either by a reconciliation or by the subordination of one to the other. But the quarrel between the Latins only became more intense, until the Council at Basle itself split in 1436. Before that date, on the whole the Council had the ascendancy; after it, the papal party began to prevail. But the Greeks could not yet be aware of the shifting balance of power.

They sent envoys both to the Pope and to the Council, and received envoys from both. The first mission from the Pope, in 1433, was led by Cristoforo Garatoni, the Latin bishop of Koroni, who had the advantage of being bilingual in Greek and Latin. He carried the interesting offer that the Council should be held in Constantinople instead of the West. The Greeks naturally welcomed the offer. Garatoni returned to the Pope early in 1434, and travelled again to Constantinople and back in 1435, to complete the agreement on a meeting at Constantinople. But the Pope's fortunes were at a low ebb in that year, and he had been forced to make substantial concessions to the Council at Basle.

In the summer of 1435 the Pope sent Ambrogio Traversari, the Abbot of the Camaldolese monastery, on a mission to Basle to seek a reconciliation. But the Council was immovable. The proposal of a meeting in Constantinople was unacceptable to the Cardinals, who had their own envoys travelling back and forth during the same years. They finally sent John of Ragusa to Constantinople in 1435 with a proposal that they should meet the Greeks in Basle, Avignon, or Savoy. John established good relations with the Patriarch Joseph II, who was a Bulgarian like himself.¹⁷ He emphasized that the Council, being more representative of the states of Europe, would be better able to send military forces to help the Greeks. But the Greeks did not want to travel so far from home as the Council proposed.

While John of Ragusa was still at Constantinople, the divisions of the Council at Basle enabled the Pope to regain some of the initiative.

¹⁵ Syropoulos, ii. 33, 49; iii. 14.

¹⁶ Id. iii. 8-9.

¹⁷ Id. iii. 2.

The majority at Basle continued to insist on meeting the Greeks somewhere far from the reach of the Pope. A minority, which called itself 'the healthier part', voted for a more reasonable proposition that the Greeks should be invited to Florence or to another Italian city acceptable to them. In May 1437 this minority sent a deputation to meet the Pope at Bologna, where he had moved from Florence. Among the deputation was Niklaus of Cues (Nicholas Cusanus), a young German priest and scholar who later became an eminent Cardinal.

Thanks largely to the tact of Nicholas Cusanus, a reconciliation and compromise were eventually achieved, at least between 'the healthier part' at Basle and the Pope. A fresh mission was sent to Constantinople, with the Pope's blessing, in September 1437. Cristoforo Garatoni and Nicholas Cusanus were both members of the mission. The majority at Basle was now isolated. They sent another mission of their own to Constantinople, which arrived a few weeks after the papal representatives, but too late. In the last week of November 1437 the Greek delegation, led by the eager Emperor and the reluctant Patriarch, embarked on the Pope's vessels.¹⁸

A number of Latin emissaries travelled back from Constantinople with the Greeks. Cristoforo Garatoni and Nicholas Cusanus were among them: the former to attend the Council at Ferrara and Florence throughout, playing an important part as interpreter; the latter to travel as far as Ferrara to meet the Pope, and then to return to the Council at Basle. John of Ragusa, who was puzzled by the latest developments, for a time gave his support to the papal delegates, but eventually returned to Basle with the rest of the Council's delegation.

There was also a private traveller in Constantinople at the time, the Castilian Pero Tafur, who witnessed the departure of the imperial party and later, through a series of accidental circumstances, joined them for the later stages of their journey.¹⁹ He had the interesting opportunity of visiting Ferrara, Florence, and Basle while the two rival Councils were in session, but unfortunately he recorded little about them in his copious memoirs.

The battle between the Pope and the Council of Basle was not yet over. Although John of Ragusa and Nicholas Cusanus returned to Basle, they had much sympathy with the Pope's cause and would have

¹⁸ Id. iv. 1-2.

¹⁹ Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, tr. Malcolm Letts (London 1926), 124-230; Syropoulos, iii. 21.

preferred a complete reconciliation. But the majority of the Council declared the Pope 'contumacious' and even purported to depose him, electing an anti-Pope in his place (Duke Amadeus of Savoy, known as Felix V) in 1439. The Pope declared the Council of Basle dissolved and summoned it to meet again in Ferrara; but it remained in session at Basle until 1449 (when Felix V resigned, without regrets).

The German princes and the King of France took a position of neutrality between the contending parties, and therefore sent no representatives to the Council at Ferrara. The English King supported the Pope, but no English representatives arrived in time for the Council. The Duke of Burgundy was the only western ruler to be represented. In a famous episode, described by Syropoulos, his ambassadors deliberately insulted the Greeks when they arrived at Ferrara nine months late, by ignoring the Greek Emperor as they marched into the meeting hall to salute the Pope.²⁰ The throne of the western Empire was vacant at the time, but an empty seat was placed in the meeting hall for the western Emperor if one should be elected in time.

The Council of Ferrara was therefore less than fully representative on the western side when it assembled early in 1438. But a number of ecclesiastical defections from the majority at Basle reinforced the Pope's position. The most important of the defectors was Cardinal Cesarini, who left Basle for Ferrara in January 1438. In the same month Eugenius IV travelled from Bologna to Ferrara. The Greeks were then also approaching the scene.

When the Emperor and the Patriarch sailed from Constantinople, they had still not definitely decided which place was their destination. The omen of an earthquake as they embarked cast doubt on the wisdom of their choice of the papal vessels.²¹ There was an atmosphere of great anxiety about the expedition. They feared that they might never see Constantinople again—a fear which was to prove justified in the case of the Patriarch.²² Turkish officials had tried menacingly to discourage them from going.²³ But perhaps the most serious anxiety was that they would not be able to stand up to the Italian scholastics in debate.

The Greek party included few churchmen of first-rate intellect. Only three were outstanding: Bessarion, the Metropolitan of Nicaea; Mark Eugenikos, who had recently been appointed Metropolitan of Ephesus; and Isidore, the Metropolitan of Kiev, who travelled direct

²⁰ Syropoulos, vi. 43.

²¹ Id. iv. 1.

²² Id. iii. 14.

²³ Id. iii. 21.

from Russia and arrived late. Of these three, the first two had been pupils of Gemistos; whether the third had also is still in doubt. The rest of the clergy were not of high intellectual calibre. This was the reason why the Emperor decided to include several learned laymen in his numerous entourage of courtiers and attendants.

He chose three in particular. One was George Scholarios, whose role became the subject of later controversy. There is no doubt of his eventual opposition to the Union on the terms finally agreed, but his earlier attitude is less clear. Gemistos, writing a decade later, called him a turncoat.²⁴ Certainly he respected the Latins, and had friends among them before 1438. He corresponded with Filelfo and Traversari.²⁵ A letter written to Pope Eugenius before the Council, in the most flattering and submissive terms, is attributed to Scholarios, but its authenticity has been disputed.²⁶ Later documents attributed to him, during and soon after the Council, appear to show him supporting the Union, but these too are open to challenge.²⁷

His devotion to Aquinas is also significant: 'I doubt if Thomas has any more fervent disciple than myself', he wrote.²⁸ But later he denounced both Aquinas and his Greek translator, Demetrios Kydones.²⁹ The most probable conclusion is that he believed in Union on reasonable terms, but not at any price. He no doubt shared the Emperor's view, which was based on the traditional doctrine of 'economy' (*οἰκονομία*) or compromise. But he argued, unsuccessfully as things turned out, that if this were to be the policy, then it was unnecessary to send a full-scale delegation to the Council.³⁰

The second of the three laymen invited by the Emperor, George Amiroutzes, was a more questionable personality. He was related by birth to a prominent Turkish family, his mother being a cousin of the mother of Mahmut Paşa, Grand Vizier to Mehmet II, the future conqueror of Constantinople.³¹ Like Bessarion, Amiroutzes was born at Trebizond. During the Council he strongly supported the project of

²⁴ PG 160, 995 c. See ch. XV, para. 29, on p. 298 below.

²⁵ Legrand (1892), 9 (Filelfo); Scholarios, iv. 434-5 (Filelfo); 440-1 (Traversari).

²⁶ Scholarios, iv. 432-3; Zisis, 358, 391.

²⁷ Scholarios, i. 296-306, 325-45, 372-4; iii. 476-538. These texts seem to support the Union on Latin terms: M. Jugie, 'L'Unionisme de Georges Scholarios', *Échos d'Orient*, 36 (1937), 65-86. But parts of them may be forged: Zisis, 128-58. See also Scholarios' arguments against the Latin case in vols. ii and iii. 1-204.

²⁸ Scholarios, vi. 179. 25-6.

²⁹ Doukas, 329. 5-8.

³⁰ Syropoulos, iii. 9.

³¹ É. Janssens, *Trebizonde en Colchide* (Brussels 1969), 157.

Union, defending even the addition of the *Filioque* to the Creed.³² In later life his religious convictions vacillated.

On one occasion he argued the merits of Orthodoxy in the presence of Mehmet II, thereby earning for himself the congratulations of Gemistos' admirer, Michael Apostoles. He also proposed marriage to the Greek widow of the last Florentine Duke of Athens: it is not known whether she had remained Orthodox or become a Roman Catholic. When Trebizond fell to Mehmet in 1461, Amiroutzes was suspected of treason, and later even accused of apostasy to Islam, which may have been his mother's original faith. Two of his sons certainly became Muslim converts.³³ In 1437, therefore, the Emperor had selected an adviser with a very eclectic sense of religious fidelity.

Gemistos was the third prominent layman in the Greek delegation. It was claimed that his friend Cyriac of Ancona, who visited Mistra in 1437, helped to persuade him to go to Italy.³⁴ No doubt Bessarion did also, in response to Scholarios' request.³⁵ Although it is uncertain where Gemistos joined the delegation, he arrived in Italy with it, as did Amiroutzes. Scholarios arrived later by himself. In Italy the lay philosophers were joined by a few expatriate Greeks, of whom the most notable were George Trapezuntius and Theodore Gazis. But these did not have the formal status of advisers to the Emperor.

George Trapezuntius had been born and brought up in Crete under Venetian rule. This had ensured him an excellent knowledge of Latin and an understanding of Roman Catholicism. He had emigrated to Italy in 1417, and studied further under two of the ablest contemporary teachers, Vittorino da Feltre and Guarino of Verona. Later he taught Greek at Vicenza and Venice, before entering the service of Pope Eugenius at Rome. His principal function was to translate Greek texts into Latin, but he was found wanting in scholarship and devoted much of his energy to philosophical controversy. He naturally favoured the Union of the Churches, but he also unwisely tried to prove the identity of Christianity and Islam. In later life his views became more and more confused. His ferocious advocacy of Aristotelianism led him into violent attacks on the Platonists, including Bessarion and Gemistos.

³² Gill (1964), 231, 261.

³³ Janssens, *op. cit.* 197-201.

³⁴ Bodnar, 48; L. Bertalot and A. Campana, 'Gli scritti di Iacopo Zeno e il suo elogio di Ciriaco d'Ancona', *La Bibliofilia*, 41 (1939), 374.

³⁵ Scholarios, iv. 437-34.

Theodore Gazis settled in Italy after 1430, having escaped from Thessalonica when it was captured by the Turks. In many respects his career ran parallel to that of George Trapezuntius: he studied and mastered Latin under Vittorino da Feltre; he attended the Council and wrote drafts in support of the Union; he served under the papacy and translated Greek texts; he espoused the Aristotelian cause against the Platonists, and also criticized Gemistos. But although Theodore Gazis and George Trapezuntius had so much in common,³⁶ they also fell foul of each other. Theodore was the better scholar of the two: his knowledge of Latin was said to be superior to that of any other Greek of his time. Neither of them, however, made any significant impact on the Council, though they no doubt proved themselves useful as interpreters.

There were other laymen also in the Greek party who attended as interpreters, courtiers, or minor functionaries. One or two of them were to play a role later in the story of Gemistos. Nicholas Secundinus, a brilliant interpreter in both languages, settled in Italy after the Council and entered successively the service of the Doges of Venice and the papacy. He was a warm supporter of Gemistos, though by his own admission no philosopher.³⁷ Another was John Argyropoulos, who moved back and forth several times between Italy and Constantinople, and also between Padua, Florence, and Rome, teaching Greek to young Italians.³⁸ Both took part in the controversy between Platonists and Aristotelians which broke out in Italy after Gemistos' death. A number of other laymen in the Greek party are known by name, but none who played a significant part in the biography of Gemistos.

The sea journey, in ships supplied mainly by Venice and Florence or from the Black Sea, was leisurely. It was possible to sleep on board, though the Patriarch took every opportunity of going ashore for the night. Bessarion took with him a quantity of books, including two copies of Strabo, who was almost unknown in the West.³⁹ Unfortunately, however, he left most of his library at Methoni on the way.

The Emperor travelled in the only Greek ship in the convoy. He too preferred the land to sea travel. When his ship reached Kenkhreai, the

³⁶ The lives of both men are summarized in *Θρησκευτική και Ἠθική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία* (Athens 1962-8).

³⁷ Mastrodimitris, *Νικόλαος Σεκουνδινός* 44.

³⁸ G. Cammelli, *Giovanni Argyropoulo* (Florence 1941), chs. IV-V.

³⁹ Syropoulos, iv. 10 and n. 4.

port of Corinth on the east coast of the Isthmus, he decided to travel overland to the south-west coast, where he rejoined the Patriarch and the fleet on 28 December 1437.⁴⁰ He was accompanied at this stage by at least two of his brothers, though only Demetrios was to go on with him to Italy. No doubt the reason for his journey overland, apart from the greater comfort, was to visit Mistra on the way.

For Gemistos the journey must have been a severe ordeal. If he set out from Constantinople, he may have either accompanied the Emperor across the Peloponnese or travelled round the Peloponnese by ship. If he had never left Mistra, it was presumably there that he joined the imperial party. Like Bessarion, he no doubt took some of his books with him. He could not yet have foreseen that Aristotle and Plato would become his main preoccupation in Italy. It is noticeable that when he was writing on his sickbed in Florence a year later, his citations from Aristotle were more precise than would be likely from memory alone, but those from Plato were seldom verbatim. Manuscripts of Aristotle would be readily available in Italy, those of Plato much less so; but Gemistos did not yet know it.

He may have had a foretaste of the Latins' interest in Greek philosophy, however, from Nicholas Cusanus, who was a fellow passenger with him. Neither of them ever mentioned the other in their respective writings, but Cusanus was certainly aware of Gemistos' work at a later date, for an early Latin translation of *De Fato* (one of the surviving chapters of Gemistos' *Book of Laws*) was dedicated to him.⁴¹ It would be strange if their common interest in philosophy did not bring them together at all in 1438. When Cusanus wrote his essay *De docta ignorantia* at the end of 1439, completing it in February 1440, he added a post-script to his patron, Cardinal Cesarini, saying that the inspiration for it came to him 'at sea, returning from Greece'.⁴²

There is thus the possibility of an acquaintance, however slight, between Gemistos and Cusanus during the months when the latter was gestating *De docta ignorantia*. The possibility has interesting implications. Cusanus was one of the most learned men in the West, and he had a special interest in Platonism, or at least in Neoplatonism. But it seems clear that at the relevant time he could not read

⁴⁰ Syropoulos, iv. 11.

⁴¹ P. O. Kristeller, *A Latin Translation of Gemistus Plethon's De Fato by Johannes Dedicated to Nicolas of Cusa*, in G. C. Sansoni (ed.), *Niccolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno* (Florence 1970).

⁴² Nikolaus von Kues, *Werke*, i, ed. P. Wilpert (Berlin 1967), *De docta ignorantia*, iii. 12. 263.

Greek.⁴³ In later life he learned some Greek, and acquired a number of Greek manuscripts. In *De docta ignorantia* there are a number of references to 'the Platonists' but very few citations from Plato's works. One of the most specific reads:

. . . ipse divinus Plato qui, ut refert Calcidius, in phedrone dixit unum esse omnium rerum exemplar sive ideam, uti in se est, in respectu vero rerum quae plures sunt plura videntur exemplaria.⁴⁴

The spelling *phedrone*, found in almost all manuscripts, indicates a confusion between the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo*. This was a common error in the pre-Renaissance West, but it would not have been committed by anyone who could read Plato in Greek. Cusanus was relying on the work of the fourth-century scholar Calcidius, who produced a partial translation of the *Timaeus* with a commentary. For many centuries this was the only work of Plato known in the West, until the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* were translated by Henricus Aristippus in the twelfth century, though still little studied. There followed Bruni's translations of the *Phaedo*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedrus* early in the fifteenth century. All these were to be found in manuscript in Cusanus' library when he died.⁴⁵ But evidently he had only Calcidius available to him when he wrote *De docta ignorantia*. The reference quoted shows that he had formed only a superficial notion of the Theory of Forms, the core of the Platonic philosophy. The inference is that if any philosophical conversation took place between Cusanus and Gemistos during the journey from Greece to Italy, Gemistos must have formed an unflattering view of the state of Platonic studies in the West. Such an early warning of what to expect would be confirmed when he arrived in Italy.

Sailing from Navarino to Venice in the first weeks of 1438, the Greek party was harassed by frequent storms and by Catalan corsairs.⁴⁶ But their welcome at Venice made up for the inconveniences. A brilliant reception was organized for their benefit, which was described by the Despot Demetrios to George Sphrantzes and later recorded in his history.⁴⁷ Sylvester Syropoulos, a member of the Greek delegation, also gave an eyewitness account in his *Memoirs*.⁴⁸ He described, too, the sorrow felt by the Greeks when they saw in the Cathedral of San

⁴³ M. Honecker, *Nikolaus von Cues und die griechische Sprache* (Heidelberg 1938), 5-14, 49-51.

⁴⁴ Nikolaus von Kues, i. 17. 48.

⁴⁵ Honecker, op. cit. 62.

⁴⁶ Syropoulos, iv. 7; 12.

⁴⁷ Sphrantzes, 322-6 (Pseudo-Phrantzes).

⁴⁸ Syropoulos, iv. 16-23.

Marco the treasures looted from Constantinople in 1204.⁴⁹ None of these experiences made any impact on Gemistos, so far as his own writings record. As a pure philosopher, he was indifferent to his surroundings, to the grandees who received them, to the splendid buildings and works of art. Nowhere in his surviving works did he even mention any of the cities he visited in Italy, except Florence.

Although the Greeks now enjoyed the comforts of hospitality on dry land, they still had anxieties. The Emperor and the Patriarch were both sick, and they could not make up their minds whether to proceed towards the Council at Basle or towards the Pope wherever he might be found in Italy.⁵⁰ The Doge suggested that they should stay in Venice and insist that the Latins should join them to hold the Council there.⁵¹ A majority of the Greek delegation, supported by the advice of John of Ragusa, also thought that they should wait where they were, at least until the Latins had composed their differences.⁵² The Marquis of Ferrara, Niccolò d'Este, on the other hand, came to Venice in his state barge, to try and persuade them to travel back with him.⁵³

Accounts differ of the considerations which finally decided the Emperor and the Patriarch. Syropoulos wrote that both preferred the Pope to the Council of Basle, but his later editor (Pseudo-Syropoulos) said that at first the Emperor preferred the Council.⁵⁴ The Patriarch's preference for the Pope was attributed to his hope that 'through the Pope he could liberate the Church from the servitude imposed on it by the Emperor'.⁵⁵ This was understandable, for when he was himself elected Patriarch in 1416, the Emperor (Manuel II) had insisted that 'the respective rights of the Emperor and the Patriarch' should first be defined.⁵⁶ Pope Eugenius himself later expressed regret to the Patriarch about the extent to which the Orthodox Church had been subordinated to the secular power,⁵⁷ of which there were many examples during the course of the Council. But the Patriarch was at the same time uneasy about the stipulation that he, like everyone else, would have to kneel before the Pope and kiss his foot. It had not yet been decided that this stipulation would be dropped.⁵⁸

The Emperor's reasoning is uncertain, but his domination over the ecclesiastics throughout the Council suggests that whatever he wished would ultimately prevail. He may have been influenced at first by the

⁴⁹ Syropoulos, iv. 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid. iv. 24.

⁵¹ Id. *Appendix*, iii. 24 (Pseudo-Syropoulos: see V. Laurent, Introduction to the *Mémoires*, 44-6).

⁵² Id. *Appendix*, iii. 17-20.

⁵³ Id. iv. 23.

⁵⁴ Id. iv. 24; *Appendix*, iii. 17.

⁵⁵ Id. iv. 31.

⁵⁶ Id. ii. 2.

⁵⁷ Id. iv. 38.

⁵⁸ Id. iv. 30; 33.

belief that the Council of Basle would be better able than the Pope to provide a military force to save Constantinople. Once he arrived in Italy, however, it must have become clear to him that the Council's authority was waning and the Pope's was in the ascendant. This observation would have reinforced the argument that a Council of Union without the Pope would be a waste of time. So in the end the decision was taken to meet the Pope, who was awaiting the Greeks at Ferrara. They arrived to join him there in early March 1438.⁵⁹ Even after that there were long delays before the formal sessions of the Council began.

The Emperor was in no hurry, because he wanted to await the arrival of a delegation from France (which never in fact arrived).⁶⁰ He spent much of his time hunting in the neighbouring countryside, to the annoyance of the Marquis of Ferrara, who complained in vain about the wholesale destruction of his game.⁶¹ Meanwhile others in the Greek party had worries of their own. The Patriarch had left his luggage at Venice by mistake; some of the bishops feared that they would be poisoned; all were short of funds. The Emperor asked the Marquis to make sure that the city gates were locked at night, to prevent any of his party escaping.⁶² A few (including Mark and John Eugenikos) nevertheless contrived to do so, but were caught and brought back.⁶³ A more effective deterrent to escape was the presence in the neighbourhood of the *condottiere* Niccolò Piccinnino, a bitter enemy of the Pope. So serious was the threat to the security of Ferrara that the Greeks sent back many of their valuables under guard to Venice. The transfer of the Council from Ferrara to Florence was mooted even before the formal sessions began.⁶⁴

Nevertheless informal contacts took place between the two parties while they waited. There were dinner parties at which the Greeks and the Latins tried to assess each other's points of view. There were discussions of the agenda and exchanges of documents. There were internal discussions on tactics within the Greek delegation, and no doubt among the better-equipped Latins, as well as private meetings between the leaders of the two delegations. There were disputes over protocol, and Greek complaints and suspicions to be overcome. But at last, on 8 October 1438, the Council held its inaugural session.⁶⁵ Three months later, with little achieved, it was transferred to Florence.

⁵⁹ Id. iv. 34.

⁶⁰ Id. vi. 9-11.

⁶¹ Id. vi. 5.

⁶² Id. vi. 1.

⁶³ Id. vi. 2; 16-17. Eventually John was allowed to leave prematurely: for his own account, see Lambros, i. 271-314.

⁶⁴ Syropoulos, vi. 17.

⁶⁵ Id. vi. 25.

VIII

FERRARA 1438

ONLY one of the sources of the Council of Union—the *Memoirs* of Sylvester Syropoulos—gives any prominence to the participation of Gemistos. Syropoulos, who was a Church office-holder (Grand Ecclesiarch) has been tentatively identified with the later Patriarch Sophronios (1463-4).¹ He was one of the signatories of the Decree of Union, who later repented and wrote his *Memoirs* by way of apology.² The *Memoirs* therefore show great respect towards those Greeks who opposed the Union, notably Mark Eugenikos. Syropoulos does not explicitly include Gemistos among them, but his references are always respectful. Gemistos would not in any case have been called upon to sign the Decree, being a layman.

Other sources barely mention Gemistos' name, apart from recording his presence. The historian Michael Doukas names 'Gemistos of Lacedaemonia' as one of the Senators present at the Council.³ The historian Laonikos Chalkokondyles, although he had been a pupil of Gemistos at Mistra, did not mention him at all. The official records known as the Greek and Latin *Acta* each mention his presence on one occasion only, the Latin *Acta* calling him simply 'quidam secularis'.⁴ He does not appear at all in any of the other reminiscences of the Council.⁵

This is not surprising, since he was not in the formal sense a member of the Council. Its proceedings provide only the background to Gemistos' stay in Italy, whose historical importance rests on other grounds. But like other laymen, including Scholarios and Amiroutzes, he was allowed to attend the formal sessions, and it is even recorded that he made one unsolicited intervention.⁶ In private sessions of the Greek delegation his opinion was often invited, and given boldly,

¹ V. Laurent, Introduction to Syropoulos' *Mémoires* (Rome 1971), 16-19.

² Laurent, *op. cit.* 14-15.

³ Doukas, 267. 21.

⁴ *Quae supersunt actorum Graecorum Concilii Florentini*, I: *Res Ferrariae gestae*, ed. J. Gill, *Concilium Florentinum, Documenta et Scriptores*, ser. B, v. 1 (Rome 1953), 36. 32; Andrea da Santa Croce, *Acta Latina Concilii Florentini*, ed. G. Hofmann, *ibid.*, ser. B, vi (Rome 1955), 33. 20-1.

⁵ For the other sources, see Gill (1959), bibliography, 416-20.

⁶ Syropoulos, vi. 31.

sometimes sardonically, but always with telling effect. He concentrated his attention on major matters of principle, ignoring what he may have considered conventional trivialities such as the use of leavened or unleavened bread or the cutting of hair and beards. His services had been enlisted as a philosopher rather than a theologian, so he confined his observations to matters which could be submitted to logical scrutiny: above all, the addition of the *Filioque* to the Creed, and the related doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit.

His skill in drafting was also appreciated. This was the first task for which he was called upon at Ferrara, before the formal sessions of the Council began. It arose from the informal contacts which took place between the arrival of the Greeks and the opening of the Council seven months later. The chief spokesman on the Catholic side, Cardinal Cesarini, proposed four topics for initial discussion: the Procession of the Holy Spirit, leavened or unleavened bread, the doctrine of Purgatory, and the primacy of the Pope. But the *Filioque* as such, which was a vital point for the Greeks, was not in Cesarini's list.

They thought it prudent, however, not to insist on raising the most controversial matters first, so they chose Purgatory. This was a doctrine of Latin origin, which the Greeks had first encountered in the early thirteenth century. It had been debated at the Council of Lyon in 1274. The Latins now submitted a memorandum, which the Greeks discussed inconclusively in private.⁷ Alternative replies were drafted by Mark Eugenikos and Bessarion, but neither satisfied the Emperor.

The Emperor finally said: 'The preamble and headings are better in the draft of the Bishop of Nicaea (Bessarion), but the arguments, the construction, and the proofs are superior in that of the Bishop of Ephesus (Mark Eugenikos).'⁸ So he appointed a drafting committee consisting of the two bishops together with Gemistos and George Amiroutzes, to combine the passages which he approved in a new draft. It was a typical compromise by an oddly assorted team. Mark Eugenikos and Bessarion had both been pupils of Gemistos, but they were already antagonistic to each other. Amiroutzes, a warm supporter of the Union, was also an arrogant and intemperate man, who later treated Gemistos with extreme rudeness at Florence.⁹ Gemistos, however, somehow managed this troublesome team, all of whom were much younger than himself, and produced an agreed draft.¹⁰ The

⁷ Id. v. 29.

⁸ Id. v. 30.

⁹ Id. ix. 12.

¹⁰ Text in *De Purgatorio Disputatio*, ed. L. Petit and G. Hofmann, *Concilium Florentinum, Documenta et Scriptores*, ser. A, viii. 2 (Rome 1969), 13-31.

Latins, who had been delaying payment of the Greeks' allowances, released them only after they received the draft.¹¹

The striking feature of this episode is that the Patriarch seems to have been virtually ignored. Syropoulos regularly assigned the chief role to the Emperor even in theological discussions. 'Everything was referred to the Emperor', he said; and again: 'Everything depended on the Emperor's judgement and will, and nothing was done in ecclesiastical matters without his consent and decision.'¹² By his account, the Patriarch played an insignificant role. He was preoccupied by a longing to return home, though death was to deny him even this solace. Scholarios confirmed Syropoulos' account, referring to Joseph as 'that useless Patriarch'.¹³

The Greek *Acta*, however, show the Patriarch playing a more effective part. It is possible that Syropoulos exaggerated the Emperor's domination over his party in order to exculpate the clergy from the ultimate surrender to the Latins. Even on Syropoulos' evidence, the Patriarch was sometimes severer than the Emperor in dealing with the anti-Unionist faction. It was Joseph, for example, who opposed the Emperor's decision to allow the anti-Unionists to leave Ferrara, and made him reverse it.¹⁴ The Emperor, on the other hand, never intervened to prevent Mark Eugenikos, the leading anti-Unionist, from arguing his case.¹⁵

It was in his personal meetings with the Pope that the Patriarch probably played his most effective role. He could call on the Pope alone, as he did on arrival at Ferrara. But the Emperor could not call on the Pope without the Patriarch. An early occasion when it became necessary for the two Greek leaders to visit the Pope together arose over the question of voting at the Council. In private discussion the Greek delegates lamented that the Latins could easily muster 200 votes against their own 30 (though the final tally of signatures was to be 117 to 33).¹⁶ This was the very point on which Gemistos had warned the Emperor twelve years earlier, as he reminded them now.¹⁷ He added that he had assumed the matter had been settled before they left Constantinople. But it had not, so the Emperor and the Patriarch undertook to discuss it with the Pope.

Even on this occasion the Emperor took the leading role. He and

¹¹ Syropoulos, v. 37.

¹³ Scholarios, iii. 142. 22.

¹⁵ Gill (1964), 115-23.

¹⁷ Id. vi. 19.

¹² Id. v. 5; v. 16.

¹⁴ Syropoulos, vi. 16-17.

¹⁶ Syropoulos, vi. 18 and n. 1.

the Patriarch were accompanied to the Pope's palace by his brother, the Despot Demetrios, but he would not allow Demetrios to come in with them. After the audience, it was the Emperor and not the Patriarch who informed the waiting bishops that the outcome of the meeting had been satisfactory, but he would not tell them what it was. 'I am not obliged to consult the bishops on such matters', he said.¹⁸ They complained to the Patriarch, who would not tell them either, no doubt on the Emperor's advice.

The outcome proved to be satisfactory only in the sense that no formal vote was ever taken in the full Council. But the Catholics always held the upper hand by virtue of their numbers, their intellectual conviction, and their efficiency. These advantages manifested themselves both in minor matters—they had shorthand-writers, which the Greeks had not¹⁹—and in major ones. There were no divisions among the Catholics, who were confident of their strength in debate, and could afford to ignore minor mishaps, such as the intervention of a group of Latin monks who expressed sympathy with the Greek arguments.²⁰ The Greeks on the contrary suffered from divisions not only between a strong Emperor and a weak Patriarch but also between their own theologians. On a mundane level, they were wholly dependent on their hosts for food, lodging, and maintenance.²¹ Although Syropoulos may have exaggerated the Latins' exploitation of this advantage, there was presumably an element of truth in it.

When the Cardinals began pressing the Greeks to join in formal sessions of the Council, they concentrated their pressure on the Emperor. At last he convened his senior advisers to discuss which topic they should broach first in formal session. Informal discussions on Purgatory had been inconclusive. The choice now seemed to lie between the addition of the *Filioque* and the Procession of the Holy Spirit.²² As the Emperor was to point out later, very sensibly, the two topics were in reality inseparable, since the basic dispute was whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son, as the Catholics held, or only from the Father, as the Greeks held; and therefore whether the addition of the words 'and the Son' was permissible.²³ But that did not prevent a protracted debate on the choice between the two topics.

The Emperor's group of advisers was numerous: the six senior bishops, among them Bessarion and Mark Eugenikos; a number of

¹⁸ Id. vi. 20.

²¹ Id. v. 37; vi. 34; ix. 4-5; and *passim*.

¹⁹ Id. vi. 26.

²² Id. vi. 21.

²⁰ Id. vi. 32.

²³ Id. vii. 21.

officials of the Church, including Syropoulos; a number of monks and abbots; the three principal laymen (Gemistos, Scholarios, and Amiroutzes); and the Despot Demetrios.²⁴ Mark Eugenikos and Gemistos proposed that they should insist on dealing first with the addition of the *Filioque* to the Creed, since that had been 'the cause and origin of the schism'. The majority supported them, but a minority consisting of Bessarion, Scholarios, Amiroutzes, and Syropoulos preferred to put first the question of the Procession of the Holy Spirit.

The conflicts of view between the leading antagonists—Mark Eugenikos against Bessarion, and Gemistos against Scholarios—were already taking shape, though the two conflicts were quite differently grounded. Between Eugenikos and Bessarion, both of whom were ordained monks (*ιερομόναχοι*), there was a theological dispute over the nature of the Trinity. Between Scholarios and Gemistos, both laymen, there was a philosophical dispute over the primacy of Aristotelianism and Platonism. The latter conflict was aggravated by the fact that Aristotelianism had been reconciled with Catholic dogma by Aquinas, whereas Platonism (or at least Neoplatonism) had made a contribution to the dogma of Hesychasm. Scholarios therefore had both theological and philosophical problems. His loyalty to Orthodoxy made it difficult for him to repudiate Hesychasm, but his devotion to Aristotle made it equally difficult for him to quarrel with the arguments of Aquinas. Gemistos suffered from no such qualms.

The immediate outcome was that the Emperor agreed with the majority—that is, with Mark Eugenikos and Gemistos—in preferring to discuss the *Filioque* first. But before making his decision he asked Demetrios' opinion, addressing him affectionately, or perhaps contemptuously, as 'little brotherkins' (*ἀδελφούτσικε*).²⁵ 'I don't know what to say on these matters', replied Demetrios. 'What am I to say on a subject which I do not understand? Nevertheless, since you insist on my saying something, it seems to me best to follow the opinion of the majority.'

Since that was also the opinion of the Emperor, it was certain to prevail. But Demetrios resented the way his brother was treating him. Before long he contrived to establish a reputation for taking sides against the Emperor, and thus for hostility to the Union. This he hoped would eventually carry him to the throne of Constantinople. He failed to realise his ambition, but it led to his submission in later life to

²⁴ Syropoulos, vi. 21.

²⁵ Id. vi. 21.

being a willing prisoner of Sultan Mehmet II, whose father-in-law he became and in whose territory he died.

Having made his decision, the Emperor told his advisers to choose their spokesmen against the Roman Catholics. They chose six at first: three bishops (Bessarion, Mark Eugenikos, Isidore of Kiev); two Church officials (one of whom, Syropoulos, successfully excused himself in favour of a third); and a single layman (Gemistos).²⁶ Once again it deserves mention that two of the bishops certainly, and the third possibly, were former pupils of Gemistos. But the Emperor immediately afterwards reduced the influence of Gemistos by deciding that only Mark Eugenikos and Bessarion could speak. He thus ensured that there could be no unified Greek view on the major questions, so that the ultimate decisions would always come back to himself.

The Catholics also chose six spokesmen, of whom the unquestioned leader was Cardinal Cesarini. One of his team, the Latin bishop Andrew Chrysoberges of Rhodes, was bilingual in Latin and Greek. This was an advantage which the Greek party lacked, although Bessarion had some knowledge of Latin and later became a master of the language. At the Council the Greeks had to rely chiefly on Gemistos' friend Nicholas Secundinus for interpretation, at which by common consent he excelled.²⁷

Since the Emperor now expressly forbade the laymen in his party to take any part in ecclesiastical debates,²⁸ Gemistos might well have felt inclined to excuse himself from the formal sessions of the Council. But he did not do so. At the third session, on 16 October, he made his one substantial intervention, ignoring (or perhaps seeking exemption from) the Emperor's orders.²⁹ The occasion was a debate in which there took place a comparison between Greek and Latin texts recording the early Councils of the Church. Mark Eugenikos was reading out the decrees in Greek. When he reached the Seventh Council (the second held at Nicaea, in 787), the Latins insisted on reading out their own version in Latin.³⁰ Their text, which was written on very ancient parchment, included the crucial word *Filioque*. Cesarini argued that the manuscript could not possibly have been altered. He added that a learned western historian, Martin of Troppau, had recorded that the formula was recited in that form at the Seventh Council. Martin of

²⁶ Id. vi. 22; confirmed by *Quae supersunt actorum Graecorum*, 36.

²⁷ Syropoulos, vi. 27; Mastrodimitris, *Νικόλαος Σεκουνδίνος*, 39.

²⁸ Syropoulos, vi. 24.

²⁹ Id. vi. 31.

³⁰ See notes by V. Laurent on Syropoulos' text (330-1 nn. 5, 6) for corrections on this point.

Troppau had lived, however, five centuries after the Council, and died in 1278. His was therefore a late and tenuous authority; but this was not the point which Gemistos made in his reply to Cesarini.

Uninvited, he pointed out that if what Cesarini said was true, the arguments which had occupied the divided Churches for centuries would have been pointless:

If the Roman Church could prove what you now say from the texts and from the historian who has written on the subject, then it was a waste of time for writers supporting the Latin cause—I mean Thomas (Aquinas) and others before him, who sought to prove in a number of treatises and books that the addition was justifiably and necessarily made by your Church, while overlooking the decisive proof of their argument as if it had no value for them. It would be sufficient for them, instead of all the arguments and syllogisms which they devised, to point out that the addition had already been made and that the formula had been read and accepted, with the addition, at the Seventh Council. But the proof that it was not advanced in that form at the Seventh Council, as you maintain that it was, is that the writers supporting the Latins have never mentioned it.³¹

After this cogent intervention, according to Syropoulos, the session was adjourned. On no other occasion, so far as the sources indicate, did Gemistos speak at a full session of the Council.

The occasion was noteworthy because it was rarely, on an objective view, that the Greeks had the better of an intellectual argument. For the most part they relied on stubborn assertions that their position was unarguably right because it had always been their position. In the words used by the Patriarch at the time of their embarkation at Constantinople, there must be no surrender of 'our sound, traditional doctrine'.³² The Orthodox Church held that its duty was to preserve the doctrine of Christ uncorrupted and unaltered, neither adding anything to it nor taking anything away. The Catholics alone, they held, had been guilty of deviation. Clearly this made reunion, or even compromise, impossible unless the Latins were prepared to make large concessions, which they were not.

Moreover, the Latins were more skilful in debate, better equipped, and on their own ground. The Greek delegates, with few exceptions, were intellectually weak and divided. Mark Eugenikos alone would defend the Greek position to its logical conclusion. Bessarion, Isidore, and the Emperor were prepared to go more than half-way to meet the Latins. Gemistos was aloof and indifferent to the finer points of

³¹ Syropoulos, vi. 31.

³² Id. iii. 25.

theology, except in so far as they could be illuminated by pure reason. Scholarios' position is uncertain. If, as is possible, the evidence for his pro-Unionism was forged, it may be presumed that he generally supported Mark Eugenikos; but his partiality for Aquinas, which is an indubitable fact, made it easy for the less sophisticated Greeks to have doubts about him. As for the rest, the aged and infirm Patriarch gave less and less leadership; and most of the bishops only wanted to go home.

The dilemma of the Greeks is illustrated by the next appearance of Gemistos in Syropoulos' narrative. They were still at Ferrara, and increasingly discontented. A transference of the Council to Florence was already in contemplation, for several reasons. There had been an outbreak of plague near Ferrara; the region was dominated by the Duke of Milan's *condottiere*, Niccolò Piccinnino; Florence was rich and could afford heavier expenditure than Ferrara; and it would be more difficult for dissident Greeks to escape to the east coast from Florence, as some had already done from Ferrara.³³

The Pope favoured the move, since Florence had been his principal residence since his expulsion from Rome in 1434. Cosimo de' Medici, who had inherited the role of papal banker and had become, also in 1434, the most powerful citizen of Florence, guaranteed that the city could meet the costs of the Council. Ambrogio Traversari went in advance to supervise the arrangements, and to look out Greek texts which were known to be in Florence. The Emperor also favoured the move, at least in part for selfish reasons: his favourite sport of hunting had exhausted the game round Ferrara, annoyed the Marquis, and led to a fight between his retinue and a monk in the monastery where he was accommodated.³⁴ Scholarios, taking time by the forelock, wrote ahead to Traversari asking to be housed in his monastery.³⁵

Many of the bishops, however, were horrified by the prospect, wondering whether they would ever see their homes again. The Patriarch, who was constantly ill, gave them little support at first, but later rallied to their side. A majority of them argued that in view of the intransigence of the Latins, it was not worth going on even to debate the crucial question of the Procession of the Holy Spirit: they might as well return to Constantinople at once.³⁶ Bessarion disagreed. When the Emperor heard that the matter had been discussed in his absence,

³³ These reasons are mentioned at various points by Syropoulos: v. 24; vi. 2; vii. 1; vii. 24-5.

³⁴ Id. vii. 10-11.

³⁵ Scholarios, iv. 440-1.

³⁶ Syropoulos, vii. 2-4.

which he had expressly told the Patriarch was impermissible, he was very angry.³⁷ As it happened, he had already secretly agreed to the move from Ferrara to Florence. It can be inferred that he was now determined on Union at virtually any price. At this juncture the question was put to Gemistos for his advice: should they proceed to debate the dogma, as the question of the Procession of the Holy Spirit was called, or should they return home with no Union accomplished?³⁸

Gemistos replied cautiously, probably knowing that the Emperor's mind was already made up:

It would be wrong just to proceed offhand to a discussion of the dogma. Our side should meet in private to consider and discuss what the Latins are likely to say; for some of our people know what the Latins have to say, and they are capable of defining and defending it even better than the Latins. So let them hear the Latins' strong points and then proceed to refute them. If our side can put forward stronger points in reply, and if they are confident beyond doubt that they can refute their opponents' points, then let them proceed to the debate. But if they perceive the other side's arguments to be too strong, then they should not proceed to the debate but consider how to handle the matter advantageously in some other way.³⁹

This somewhat uninspired advice, which left his audience little the wiser, was given in the presence of both the Emperor and the Patriarch. The latter then asked to talk to Gemistos in private.

Pretending to be in doubt whether the Greeks or the Latins were right about the Procession of the Holy Spirit, the Patriarch tried to elicit Gemistos' real opinion, saying:

You are a teacher and a learned man, and you have a right understanding of these matters both through long experience and through the study you have made of them. Besides, you are an old man and a good one, who puts the truth before everything. That is why I thought it right to invite you privately to inform me about matters on which I am still in doubt. So tell me frankly, on your hope of salvation, which of the two views you think contains the greater truth?⁴⁰

This was a striking illustration of the important role played by laymen in the theological debates of the Orthodox Church—all the more striking because Gemistos was almost certainly, though not avowedly, already a lapsed Christian. He regarded the whole controversy as philosophically pointless, but his reply was scrupulously and perhaps cynically orthodox:

None of us should be in any doubt about what our side is saying. For see, we hold our doctrine in the first place from our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and

³⁷ Syropoulos, vii. 12-15.

³⁸ Id. vii. 16-18.

³⁹ Id. vii. 16.

⁴⁰ Id. vii. 17.

secondly from the Apostle; and these are the foundations of our faith on which all our teachers base themselves. Since therefore our teachers adhere to the foundations of the faith and do not deviate in the slightest, and since the foundations are absolutely clear, no one should have any doubt about what they say. If anyone is in doubt about these matters, I do not know how he can prove his faith. For even those who disagree with us do not doubt what our Church holds and proclaims, since they admit that what we say is valid and wholly true, and they feel obliged to prove that their own views coincide with ours. So no one who belongs to our Church should be in any doubt about our doctrine, when even those who differ from us are not. As for the Latins' doctrine, there is nothing unreasonable about calling it in question, and doing so perhaps where it is subject to examination and proof, for it would be another matter where their doctrine is completely irreconcilable with our own.⁴¹

His argument still amounted to little more than maintaining not that the Greeks' view was held because it was true, but that it was true because they had always held it. This was so orthodox an argument that full confidence can be placed in Syropoulos' record of it, whether he was present or received it at second hand.

Gemistos' response satisfied the Patriarch more than the Emperor. The Patriarch believed that the Greek doctrine was bound to prevail if it was effectively presented. But the Emperor wanted to meet the Latins with a more open mind. He repeatedly appealed to the Church's favourite principle of 'economy'. As he said on another occasion, when he and his advisers were discussing the doctrine of Purgatory: 'We must expel prejudices from our minds, and not hold the Latin doctrine to be mistaken nor our own to be certain, but regard both as equally uncertain until they are examined; and whatever is found to be correct upon examination and decision by the Council must be accepted as undoubted truth.'⁴² When Gemistos heard this remark, he commented to Bessarion and others present: 'In all the years I have known the Emperor, I never heard a more deplorable remark from him than what he has just said. For if we are to be doubtful about the doctrine of our Church, there is no reason to believe its teaching; and what could be worse than that?'⁴³ Gemistos was commenting disingenuously on the Emperor's tactical stance, not on the theological merit of his argument. But at the same time he was establishing himself as whole-heartedly Orthodox in the eyes of any of his companions who might suspect him of heresy.

Ostensibly the argument was still unresolved, but in fact the Emperor had already made his decision. When his advisers assembled

⁴¹ Id. vii. 17.

⁴² Id. vii. 18.

⁴³ Id. vii. 18.

for the last and decisive meeting, Gemistos remarked: 'This day will bring us either life or death!'⁴⁴ It is again difficult to believe in the sincerity of his position. Although he later wrote an essay attacking the Latin doctrine on the Procession of the Holy Spirit, it was really a matter of indifference to him whether the Greek or the Latin view was theologically correct.

As a political judgement, however, his remark may be taken more seriously, for it still seemed possible that the survival of Constantinople depended on the prospect of Union, and that prospect depended on the continuation of the Council. Ambrogio Traversari, one of the most sympathetic of the Roman Catholics, had recently made this point to some of his friends, saying that once the Union was accomplished, 'we will equip numerous galleys and send powerful aid to the Greeks'.⁴⁵ But Traversari, who was also said to be 'very expert in Greek culture',⁴⁶ was perhaps only taking advantage of his understanding of Greek psychology. No such expedition was ever to be sent.

In the end the decisive meeting of the Greeks voted in favour of continuing the Council, as the Emperor wished. His preference was opposed only by the Patriarch and three others, one of whom was the narrator, Syropoulos.⁴⁷ Mark Eugenikos, the strongest opponent of compromise, was not among the minority which voted against continuation, which suggests that he still hoped the Greek arguments would prevail. Few of the other bishops were so optimistic. Their confidence was further shaken a few days later, when the Emperor revealed the plan to shift the Council to Florence.

'They are good people there, and rich', he explained.⁴⁸ His argument was endorsed in the following generation by the historian Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who came from a family which had intermarried with the Acciaiuoli, the Florentine Dukes of Athens. Florence, he wrote, was 'the richest city after Venice'; the Florentines excelled in intelligence and negotiating skill, and their women were exceptionally beautiful.⁴⁹ The attractions of Florence were epitomized in the family headed by Cosimo de' Medici, whose eagerness to entertain the Greeks was to give a historic impetus to the western Renaissance. Nothing was said to the Greeks of the real reasons for the Emperor's decision, but the bishops suspected them.

They were particularly upset when the Patriarch advised them to send most of their luggage back to Venice before leaving for Florence,

⁴⁴ Syropoulos, vii. 21.

⁴⁵ Id. v. 20.

⁴⁶ Id. x. 5.

⁴⁷ Id. vii. 21-3.

⁴⁸ Id. vii. 25.

⁴⁹ Chalkokondyles, ii. 66-7, 286.

taking with them only the necessary vestments for the celebration of the Union, which, he said, 'will take place there'.⁵⁰ Surely, they protested, that was taking too much for granted? Gemistos made a characteristically sardonic comment:

Do the bishops find it painful to be told now that the Union will take place, so that they should take their vestments with them? I should say that from the moment when they acquiesced in the move to Florence and agreed to debate the dogma, they should not merely have to take their vestments with them but wear them when they set out from here!⁵¹

He did not remind them that the decision had been taken at least partly, if indirectly, on his advice. Many of them now began to fear that if they did not accept the Union, they would never be provided with the means to return home. They were convinced that the Latins were deliberately delaying their rations and allowances to put pressure on them. The arrears were only made up after they had agreed to go to Florence.⁵²

Gemistos had no such anxieties. If the worst came to the worst, he would have no difficulty in establishing himself either at Florence or at one of the Renaissance courts, as other less eminent scholars had already done. If evidence were wanted, it came in the form of an invitation from Sigismondo Malatesta, a patron of the arts as well as a well-known *condottiere*, to join his court at Rimini.⁵³ It is not known when the invitation was proffered, and it was never accepted; nor is there any evidence that Gemistos and Malatesta ever met. But at least Gemistos had no personal reasons to worry about the outcome of the Council, when such opportunities were open to him.

His limited interest in the proceedings of the Council was already turning to indifference. There were more attractive occupations, both social and intellectual, for a philosopher. There was also the challenge of an interesting discovery: that the Latin scholastics knew little of Plato and had an imperfect understanding even of Aristotle. It is impossible to say when this discovery was borne in upon Gemistos. In the absence of positive evidence, it cannot be definitely connected with the possibility of his encounter with Nicholas Cusanus on the voyage from Greece. But Cusanus stayed, at least for a short time, at Ferrara to report to Pope Eugenius on his mission;

⁵⁰ Id. vii. 28.

⁵¹ Id. vii. 28.

⁵² Id. vii. 31.

⁵³ Ch. Yriarte, *Un condottiere au XV^e siècle: Rimini* (Paris 1882), 449, quoting Francesco Filelfo's son Mario.

and in all probability it was from social contacts at Ferrara, whether or not these included Cusanus, that Gemistos formed his first impressions. Three such contacts are recorded by participants.

Syropoulos records two dinners given at Ferrara by Cardinal Cesarini. Both were attended by members of the Greek delegation, against the advice of the Patriarch. Bessarion, Gemistos, and Amirutzes were present at the first, during which a philosophical discussion took place. 'Our people worked out solutions to the problems posed satisfactorily', says Syropoulos: and that is all the detail he gives.⁵⁴ On the second occasion he does not mention Gemistos, and the discussion was evidently ecclesiastical rather than philosophical. Cesarini apparently persuaded Mark Eugenikos to write a eulogy of the Pope.⁵⁵ The Emperor complained about it to the Patriarch, and no doubt further such occasions were more firmly discouraged. Syropoulos' evidence thus throws little light on Gemistos' encounters at Ferrara, beyond the confirmation that on at least one specific occasion he had the opportunity of a philosophical discussion.

But a more important occasion is recorded in greater detail by two different sources. It was a dinner given by Ugo Benzi, a celebrated doctor, philosopher, and polymath, a native of Siena who lived at Ferrara and died in the following year (1439). The occasion is described by two of those present: Benzi's son Socino, and Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, who like Benzi came from the neighbourhood of Siena. Both record that the dinner was attended by prominent Greeks, and Piccolomini adds that the Marquis of Ferrara was present. Neither source names any of the Greeks, but Gemistos' presence can reasonably be inferred. He himself named Ugo Benzi (whom he called Ougon in Greek) as one of his acquaintances in Italy.⁵⁶ Since the dinner was followed by a debate on Plato and Aristotle, it would have been an extraordinary gap in the proceedings, and one calling for special mention, if the most celebrated Platonist of the day were not present.

Socino Benzi describes with filial piety how his father discoursed 'on the causes and principles of things, on the movement of the heavens, on the eternity of the world, on the immortality of souls, on intelligences and God'.⁵⁷ Piccolomini describes the skill with which Ugo Benzi 'quietly and gradually tempted the Greeks into a debate' at

⁵⁴ Syropoulos, v. 3.

⁵⁵ Id. v. 3-4.

⁵⁶ PG 160, 982 B.

⁵⁷ D. P. Lockwood, *Ugo Benzi, Medieval Philosopher and Physician* (Chicago 1951), 155, quoting Socino Benzi's *Vita Ugonis*.

the end of a lavish banquet.⁵⁸ He brought out 'all the philosophical points on which Plato and Aristotle seem to disagree with each other and to be in serious conflict, saying that he would defend whichever side the Greeks thought should be refuted'. The Greeks accepted the challenge, but Piccolomini considered that Benzi decisively won the debate. He concludes that:

In the end when Ugo, as king of the entertainment, had defeated the Greek philosophers one after another by his reasoning and eloquence and reduced them to silence, it was plain that the Latins, who had once overcome the Greeks in the arts of war and the glory of arms, were in our time again superior to them in letters and in the form of all kinds of learning.⁵⁹

The Greeks, and in particular Gemistos, would no doubt have delivered a different verdict. It is not difficult to see here one of the sparks which fired Gemistos' decision to formulate his own analysis of the differences between Plato and Aristotle.

Ugo Benzi was an Aristotelian, as were most of his intellectual circle at Ferrara. He has been described by a biographer as a perfect medieval Scholastic.⁶⁰ Gemistos expressed approval of him as a man who wished to understand the real significance of the great philosophers; and he remarked that on one occasion (perhaps at this very dinner-party) Benzi admitted that the Greeks' interpretation of a particular passage in Aristotle was preferable to that of the Latins.⁶¹ But he noted also (without specific reference to Benzi) that 'most of the westerners' were too much influenced by Averroes.⁶² It seemed that Aristotle was chiefly known in the West through Latin translations and Arabic commentaries, which surprised Gemistos. Plato was even less well understood, in Gemistos' opinion, since few westerners knew Greek well enough to read the dialogues in the original language, and the process of translating them into Latin was still incomplete.

The time thus seemed ripe for a comparative study of Platonism and Aristotelianism by a philosopher who could read and write their language as his own. Two things were needed in Gemistos' opinion: to clarify the fragmentary and confused interpretations of the two philosophers current in the West; and to restore the balance between Plato and Aristotle in the estimation of the westerners, who underrated the former and overrated the latter. It was a matter of removing

⁵⁸ *Pii II Pontificis Maximi Asiae Europaeque elegantissima descriptio* (Paris 1534), 434.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 435.

⁶¹ PG 160, 982 B-C.

⁶⁰ Lockwood, *op. cit.* 3-4.

⁶² *Ibid.* 1006 B.

misinterpretations rather than of educating *ab initio*. The time was happily ripe for such an initiative.

Plato had been little studied in the West at first hand for many centuries before 1400. Only three of the dialogues were available in Latin, and they were variously estimated. The *Timaeus*, which had been familiar since the fourth century, was acceptable to the Church because its account of the Creation was thought to be compatible with Genesis. The *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, which had both become available in the twelfth century, were comparatively little studied because they were regarded as heretical. The *Meno* assumed the pre-existence of the human soul before birth; the *Phaedo* appeared to deny the resurrection of the body. The consequence of such limited study was that few in the West were familiar with Platonism (as distinct from Neoplatonism) until Manuel Chrysoloras began to encourage his Florentine pupils to translate the rest of the dialogues early in the fifteenth century.

It is true that there were professed Platonists in the West during the ten centuries from the fifth to the fifteenth. There were also scholars, or at least grammarians, who could read and write Greek. But there were very few who could be called both Greek scholars and philosophers. The few who could, such as Johannes Scotus Erigena in the ninth century, were commonly regarded as heretical. Not only an interest in Plato but even an aptitude for Greek excited suspicion in the Church. Even almost a century after 1439, Erasmus was to find that this was still the case.⁶³

So the little that was known of Plato before the fifteenth century came at second or third hand. Western philosophers knew him as the progenitor of the Theory of Forms, and hence as the protagonist of Realism in the debate on universals. They were familiar with quotations from his works by Cicero, St Augustine, and Macrobius. They had the summary by Pseudo-Apuleius, *De Dogmate Platonis*. They could read Neoplatonic writings in Latin, such as the *Liber de Causis* attributed to Aristotle, the passages of Hermes Trismegistos translated by Lactantius in the fourth century, and the treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite translated by Johannes Scotus Erigena. But although they respected Plato as a name, they had little conception of his real significance. Dante, for example, merely placed him among a score of philosophers who made obeisance to Aristotle, 'the Master of those who know'.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen (Oxford 1906-58), iv. 182; vii. 193.

⁶⁴ *Inferno*, iv. 131-4.

The case of Aristotle was different, as Dante's reference emphatically shows. By the end of the thirteenth century the whole of his works were known in Latin translation, either from Arabic (itself translated from Syriac) or from the original Greek. Although at first the study of Aristotle, no less than of Plato, had been regarded with suspicion by the Church, his logical works were soon accepted as indispensable and became the basis of Nominalism in the debate on universals. From this point it was a short step to the acceptance of his *Metaphysics* and then his *Physics*. The Aristotelian system was so coherent that it was difficult to accept parts of it without the whole. The process of assimilating Aristotle to Christian doctrine was completed by St Thomas Aquinas in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. But even the most learned philosophers still knew Aristotle only at second hand. The great Arab commentator Averroes, for example, knew no Greek; and Aquinas and Dante knew very little.

The rise of Aristotelianism did further harm to the reputation of Plato, since Aristotle had frequently and severely criticized his former teacher. But a reaction set in during the fourteenth century. Petrarch was an early champion of Plato against Aristotle, though he could read neither in the original. There were even some theologians who espoused Platonism, or at least Neoplatonism, and others who tried to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, hoping thus to make Plato also acceptable to the Church. But it was only at the turn of the century, under the influence of Manuel Chrysoloras at Florence, that the serious study of Plato began.

It began merely as part of the general revival of classical studies known as 'humanism'. In the first half of the fifteenth century a very wide range of the Greek classics was translated into Latin for the first time, most of them by pupils of Chrysoloras or by their pupils in turn. Thus many of the major prose writers made their first appearance in the early Renaissance—Herodotus, Thucydides, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Xenophon, Plutarch, Arrian, Lucian; and some works which had a special significance for the new interest in science and secular philosophy—Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* and Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, for instance. Some Churchmen disapproved of these humanist efforts, but others acquiesced in them. The translation of Ptolemy was made by Iacopo di Agnolo for Pope Gregory XII; that of Diogenes Laertius was made by Ambrogio Traversari, the learned Camaldolese abbot.

From Gemistos' point of view the most significant fact was that

Plato and Aristotle had both been included in the scope of the humanist translators from the beginning. Chrysoloras had encouraged one pupil, Roberto de' Rossi, to undertake new translations of Aristotle, and another, Uberto Decembrio, to start work on Plato's *Republic*. The latter work was being completed by Uberto's son Candido (though not in Florence) at the very time of Gemistos' visit to Italy. Even more important was the work of Lionardo Bruni, the Chancellor of the Signoria at Florence. He translated half a dozen major works of Plato in the first four decades of the fifteenth century, and also made fresh translations of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*. The work of these Italian scholars can only have circulated slowly in the days before printing, but Gemistos could have heard news of it before he left Ferrara for Florence, since many of the humanists were present at the Council from the beginning.

Some of the scholars whom he must have met at Ferrara came on to Florence when the Council moved in January 1439. Among them naturally were Cardinal Cesarini and Ambrogio Traversari. Others were Giovanni Tortelli, who had been recalled from Greece to assist Cesarini; Giovanni Aurispa and Guarino of Verona, who both served as interpreters; Poggio Bracciolini, the celebrated collector of manuscripts, who was a member of the papal Curia; and Leon Battista Alberti, a polymath of all the talents, also in the papal entourage. Another was Pietro Vitali (called Peter of Calabria), the bilingual Abbot of Grottaferrata, who shared with Ugo Benzi and Paolo Toscanelli the distinction of being the only Italian acquaintances named by Gemistos.

There were others whom he could not have seen again after Ferrara. Apart from Ugo Benzi, who died in 1439, they included Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, and Nicholas Cusanus, another future Cardinal, both of whom left Ferrara on other missions to the north. Less celebrated was another young member of the papal entourage and a talented translator of Greek, Lapo di Castiglionchio, whom perhaps Gemistos never noticed at Ferrara but who certainly took notice of the Greeks. He found their beards comical, but admired their scholarship. He too never took the road to Florence, for he died in 1438.⁶⁵

What impression Gemistos personally made on the learned Italians in Ferrara can only be a matter of conjecture, for none of them ever mentioned him by name. Since he spoke favourably of Ugo Benzi and

⁶⁵ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, i, ed. A. Greco (Florence 1970), 581-3.

Pietro Vitali,⁶⁶ it can reasonably be assumed that they too appreciated him. But it was not until the transfer of the Council to Florence that the Italians began to take full advantage of the opportunity offered by his presence among them. Even then it is only possible to name a mere handful of men who undoubtedly knew and heard him.

⁶⁶ PG 160, 982 B.

IX

HUMANISTS AND SCHOLASTICS

THE transfer of the Council from Ferrara to Florence began on 16 January 1439, witnessed among others by Pero Tafur, and was completed on 15 February. The Greeks already knew about the wealth of Florence, for commerce and banking in their own country were dominated by Florentines, among other Italians. Now they could see for themselves how far Italy had surpassed Greece in the practical and visual arts and the material amenities of life, as well as in scholarship. By the early fifteenth century, when the University of Constantinople was defunct, there were no less than fourteen universities in Italy—half the total for the whole of Europe.

Educated Greeks already reluctantly recognized the superiority of Italian culture. Kydones had done so in the previous century. Now Scholarios wrote to his pupils, at some date between 1430 and 1440, that Constantinople 'had once been a city of scholarship, as it now is one of ruins'. He went on:

Generations of Italians, whom we once regarded as barbarians, are now applying themselves to scholarly studies, or rather adding to existing knowledge, while to us books are a burden, or rather we have surrendered them to those who know how to use them, so that if we are ever to take up learning properly and to revive what we have meanwhile neglected, we should have to seek from abroad the books necessary for our purpose.¹

Educated Italians, by contrast, still revered Byzantium. A few years after Scholarios, Aeneas Sylvius wrote:

Constantinople remains to this day a monument of ancient wisdom, the home of letters, and the citadel of philosophy. No Italian can pretend to be educated unless he has studied for a time at Constantinople.²

In literary and philosophical education, there was still room for both points of view. But in all the other arts of civilized life, there could be no question of the superiority of Italy, and especially of Florence.

Italian manufacture and trade were supported by major advances in technology. The disparity with the East was recognized in an impor-

¹ Scholarios, iv. 405.

² *Pii II Pontificis Maximi Opera Omnia* (Basle 1551), 681 B (= *Epistolarum Liber* 1. cxxxix).

tant letter addressed to the Despot Constantine by Bessarion in 1444, after he had settled in Italy.³ In the visual arts, which were closely related to trade because painters and sculptors were still essentially artisans dependent on wealthy patrons, there was an equally marked disparity. As Giorgio Vasari constantly reminded his readers in the following century, the Florentine painters had already shaken off the constrictions of Byzantine formalism, to which their art had once been subordinated. In sculpture and architecture they had gone back beyond Byzantium to revive the genius of classical styles. Already in 1439 Florence was the greatest open-air museum in the world.

But all this was of little significance to Gemistos, who was indifferent to his physical environment. Two things only would have impressed him about Florentine life: the political system and the revival of secular philosophy, particularly Platonism. These two features combined to form the special character of fifteenth-century Florence, which became known to a later age as 'civic humanism'. Gemistos would have preferred in principle that Florence should be a monarchy rather than a republic, so he would have been pleased by the later rise of the Medici to hereditary rule. In other respects Florence already conformed to the character recommended in his own political writings.

Other Italian cities also had their colonies of humanists, but it was only at Florence that these men played an active role in political life. Elsewhere they served mostly as clerks, lawyers, and tutors to the aristocracy. At Florence a succession of Chancellors of the Signoria were drawn from the ranks of the humanists. The greatest of them, Lionardo Bruni, was in office in 1439, to welcome the Greeks with a fluent speech in their own language. Wealthy merchants and even churchmen were active students of the Greek classics. Florence's most powerful citizen, Cosimo de' Medici, was the centre of a circle of humanists. He had studied Greek under Roberto de' Rossi, an early pupil of Chrysoloras; he had travelled among the northern monasteries with Poggio Bracciolini in search of manuscripts; and he was to be the founder of the Platonic Academy and the patron of Marsilio Ficino, the greatest Platonist of the Italian Renaissance.

Gemistos found himself immediately at home in this environment. He was little needed at the Council, for the Greek delegation was increasingly dominated by the Emperor, who now seldom sought the advice of laymen. So Gemistos spent his time instead among the

³ Mohler, iii. 439-49.

Florentine humanists, discussing philosophy and correcting their misunderstandings of Plato and Aristotle. Eventually the discussions seem to have taken the form of lectures by Gemistos, which he later embodied in a summary version entitled *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato* (literally, 'with regard to Plato'), commonly known as *De Differentiis*. A decade later he thus described the circumstances in which he wrote it:

That work was not composed as a result of thorough research . . . but at a time when I had been indisposed at Florence and was unable for several days to go out of the house where I was staying; perhaps, too, because I was bored, and was trying at one and the same time to relieve my boredom and to do a favour to those who were interested in Plato. Thus I wrote that work in the briefest form. . . .⁴

This explanation helps to account for some obscurities and errors of syntax in *De Differentiis*. It also suggests that it was a summary of more extensive talks or lectures.

The impact of these lectures can be judged only from a few instances, but one of them is of decisive importance. Some twenty years afterwards, and less than ten years after Gemistos' death, Cosimo de' Medici founded what became known as the Platonic Academy. It was rather an intellectual dining club than a formal institution of learning. One of its principal functions was to celebrate Plato's supposed birthday every year. Continuity and direction were provided by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), the son of the Medici family doctor, who owed his education in Greek to the patronage of Cosimo. It was Ficino himself who recorded how the Academy owed its genesis to Gemistos' lectures:

At the time when the Council was in progress between the Greeks and the Latins at Florence under Pope Eugenius, the great Cosimo, whom a decree of the Senate (*Signoria*) designated *Pater patriae*, often listened to the Greek philosopher Gemistos (with the cognomen Plethon, as it were a second Plato) while he expounded the mysteries of Platonism. And he was so immediately inspired, so moved by Gemistos' fervent tongue, that as a result he conceived in his noble mind a kind of Academy, which he was to bring to birth at the first opportune moment. Later, when the great Medici brought his great idea into being, he destined me, the son of his favourite doctor, while I was still a boy, for the great task.⁵

The Academy was mentioned as such for the first time in a letter from Ficino to Cosimo dated 4 September 1462 ('Academiam quam

⁴ PG 160, 1017 C-D.

⁵ Ficino, ii. 1537.

nobis in agro Caregio parasti'),⁶ Cosimo's villa at Careggi being the usual meeting place. It was probably founded in 1459 or 1460. The delay in establishing it is explained by Ficino's reference to 'the first opportune moment'. In 1439 there was only a handful of Italians competent to study Plato in Greek, for the generation taught by Chrysoloras was already passing away and Ficino himself was only five years old. Few of the future members of the Academy were of an age to profit from Gemistos' lectures. Which Italians formed his audience, and for which readers he wrote *De Differentiis*, are therefore difficult questions.

Chance or circumstances excluded many who might have profited from hearing Gemistos. Some had died while at Ferrara; others had been sent on missions elsewhere. By no means all the Florentine humanists were adherents of Cosimo de' Medici: his active antagonists, such as Palla Strozzi and Rinaldi degli Albizzi, had been exiled. Some who have been speculatively imagined as members of Gemistos' audience, such as Pomponius Laetus (born 1425) and Donato Acciaiuoli (born 1429), were simply too young. Three other absentees are interesting in the biography of Gemistos: Lorenzo Valla, who never met him but shared his philosophical interests; Francesco Filelfo, who met him only after the Council; and Sigismondo Malatesta, who probably never met him but formed a warm admiration for him.

Valla was living in Naples during the Council of Florence, at the cultivated court of Alfonso V, the 'Magnanimous'. He was in correspondence at the time with Giovanni Tortelli, who was at Florence in the service of Cardinal Cesarini.⁷ The tone of their correspondence suggests that Valla, who was hostile to the papacy at this stage of his life, showed a close interest in the Greek point of view. His interest would no doubt have extended to Gemistos if they had been aware of each other's work. They shared, among other prejudices, a distaste for both monasticism and Aristotelianism. Some similarities of language between them have led to the conjecture that either Valla may have read *De Differentiis* while he was writing his *Disputationes Dialecticae* or that Gemistos may have come across the latter work.⁸ But the matter is hard to prove since the two works were almost contemporaneous.

⁶ A. Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia platonica di Firenze* (Florence 1902), 537-8.

⁷ S. I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia* (Florence 1972), 211-12.

⁸ Masai (1956), 338-9; S. I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla, tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Pistoia 1977), 89-90.

Francesco Filelfo provides the evidence that the theme of Gemistos' lectures, if not the text of *De Differentiis* itself, was known outside Florence within a few months. This nomadic scholar had studied at Padua and Constantinople, and taught at Venice and Bologna, before settling in Florence on the invitation of Niccolò Niccoli with the support of Cosimo de' Medici. But a breach with Cosimo led to his departure in 1434. After a time at Siena he returned to Bologna. There he met Gemistos, as he recalled in a flattering letter two years later.⁹

The date of their meeting can be inferred with reasonable probability. Filelfo was officially employed as a teacher at Bologna during the first six months of 1439. His correspondence shows that he visited other cities of northern Italy during that time, but he was certainly at Bologna in January, when the Greeks were travelling from Ferrara to Florence. Bologna would normally have been on their route, but all the parties to the Council evidently avoided it because the city was in the hands of Piccinnino. The Greeks travelled in three groups, led by the Patriarch, Isidore, and the Emperor respectively; and all three went by way of Faenza instead of Bologna. Gemistos cannot therefore have met Filelfo on the outward journey, and must have done so on the return some six months later, which was made by way of Bologna. An indirect confirmation of this inference is the survival of an epigram in praise of Gemistos by Filelfo, in six Greek hexameters, dated 16 August 1439. It would be a natural outcome of their meeting shortly before that date.¹⁰

In a letter of 1 November from Pavia to Sassuolo of Prato (called Saxolus Pratensis), Filelfo referred to his 'sudden departure' from Bologna, but unfortunately gave no date.¹¹ The letter is interesting, however, for other reasons. It deals with a point of Greek etymology about which Sassuolo had questioned Filelfo, who was an acknowledged expert. The letter ends with a message to Bruni (called Leonardus Aretinus because he was born at Arezzo), which proves that Sassuolo was then at Florence. It cannot be shown that he was there earlier, when Gemistos was lecturing, but his interest in Greek is confirmed by another letter to him from Filelfo two years later. Sassuolo was considering a visit to Greece, and Filelfo wrote to tell him that the only man in the Peloponnese worth visiting was Gemistos.

⁹ Legrand (1892), 48-9.

¹⁰ For the dates, see G. Voigt, *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums* (Berlin 1893), ii. 52, 121-2 n. 1; Syropoulos, vii. 32 and 35 with footnotes; Filelfo, *Epistole* (Paris 1503?), fos. xxix^v-xxxv^v; Legrand (1892), 49.

¹¹ Filelfo, *op. cit.*, fo. xxxv^{r-v}.

But there is no positive evidence that Sassuolo ever met him or heard him lecture.

Filelfo himself certainly did not hear Gemistos in 1439, but he learnt about his lectures from correspondence with Scholarios, whom he had known since his student days at Constantinople. He wrote to Scholarios from Bologna on 29 March 1439 in reply to a letter which is not extant.¹² Clearly Gemistos' lectures had already begun, and had made an impact. Filelfo did not name Gemistos in his letter, but he congratulated Scholarios on supporting Aristotle against those who 'misrepresent' him. There are other indications in Filelfo's letter that Scholarios had written to him about the controversy caused by Gemistos' lectures. Unfortunately Filelfo's reply does not cast a flattering light on his own scholarship.

Filelfo expressed regret that he had been unable to find a copy of 'Aristotle's work on the doctrines of the philosophers (*περὶ τῶν ἀρεσκόντων τοῖς φιλοσόφοις*)'. He implied that Scholarios had asked him to find it. But Scholarios must have known, if Filelfo did not, that it was not a work by Aristotle but one then attributed (though mistakenly) to Plutarch. The letter went on to argue that it was hard to deduce from the *Ethics* and the *Metaphysics* what were the real objections of Aristotle to Plato's Theory of Forms. Whether Scholarios had really posed such a foolish question cannot be known, but in fact nothing is easier than to understand Aristotle's objections. The letter exposes Filelfo's pretensions, but it does also indicate that he was generally informed about the theme of Gemistos' lectures.

The epigram in praise of Gemistos, which Filelfo composed on 16 August 1439, was preserved by a later, anonymous hand which inscribed it in one of the earliest printed editions of *De Differentiis* (Paris 1541).¹³ There is no evidence, however, that Filelfo ever saw a written text of Gemistos' lectures, although Gemistos wrote it for his Italian friends and perhaps carried it with him when he left Florence. Nor would Filelfo have profited much if he had read it. His indiscriminate praise of both Gemistos and Scholarios shows that he hardly understood the controversy between them. He was not qualified for profound speculation in metaphysics, though he was an important intermediary between Greek and Latin humanists.

Filelfo also provides a link with Sigismondo Malatesta, another of the significant absentees from Florence, who admired Gemistos from afar. According to Mario Filelfo, Francesco's son, Sigismondo once

¹² Legrand (1892), 31-3.

¹³ Ibid. 49.

tried to attract Gemistos to his court at Rimini, together with Justus Basinius, with an offer of handsome remuneration.¹⁴ Basinius, a poet and humanist who had learned Greek from Theodore Gazis and Vitorino da Feltre at Mantua, accepted the offer and came to Rimini, where he died young.¹⁵ His tomb was set in the outer wall of the Tempio Malatestiano, which Leon Battista Alberti designed for Sigismondo as a quasi-pagan temple, dedicated to the 'divine Isotta', Sigismondo's mistress and later wife.¹⁶ If Gemistos ever received the invitation, he must have refused it, for he never set foot in Rimini and probably never met Sigismondo Malatesta. But in the end, thanks to Sigismondo's persistence, Gemistos' bones too were to be entombed in the outer wall of the Tempio.¹⁷

The origins of Sigismondo Malatesta's admiration for Gemistos are mysterious. He was only 22 years of age in 1439, but already acquiring a reputation for the extravagances typical of a Renaissance prince. During his life of fifty years (1417-68) he became known as a *condottiere*, a heretic, an unscrupulous scoundrel and notorious adulterer, but also as a discriminating patron of the arts, literature, and philosophy. Aeneas Sylvius, as Pope Pius II, charged Malatesta with parricide, sacrilege, treason, and heresy, and had him twice burnt in effigy at Rome; but he also recognized the vigour of his mind, his eloquence, his military skill, his learning in history and philosophy.

The Pope added some remarks which would scarcely account for Malatesta's intellectual sympathy with Gemistos: 'he hated priests, had no belief in the world to come, and thought that the soul died with the body'. These particular prejudices were all quite foreign to Gemistos (who disapproved of monks but not of priests as such). But he would have been gratified, perhaps, by his own eventual interment in the Tempio Malatestiano, which the Pope described as 'full of pagan works, so that it seemed to be a temple of infidels worshipping daemons rather than of Christians'.¹⁸

Alberti's reconstruction of what had been a church began only in 1446, so it is unlikely that Gemistos ever heard of his eventual resting-place. Meanwhile, in 1439 Sigismondo Malatesta was engaged in fortifying Rimini. He might have heard of Gemistos from mutual acquaintances who were at Florence in that year. One was Alberti

¹⁴ Ch. Yriarte, *Un Condottiere au XV^e siècle: Rimini* (Paris 1882), 449.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 255-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. X, pp. 178-252.

¹⁷ Masai (1956), 364-5.

¹⁸ *Pii II Pontificis Maximi Commentarii rerum memorabilium* (Frankfurt 1614), 51-2.

himself; another was Cyriac of Ancona, who also visited Rimini ten years later, after his last visit to Gemistos at Mistra; a third was Paolo Toscanelli, the mathematician and astronomer, who had a later link with Rimini, since it was his astrological advice to the Signoria of Florence which led to the appointment of Sigismondo as the city's *condottiere* in 1453.

It happens that Toscanelli was, with Ugo Benzi and Pietro Vitali, one of only three Italians whom Gemistos actually named as his acquaintances. None of them is specifically mentioned as having attended his lectures. In fact, apart from Cosimo de' Medici, only one man can be named with certainty as a member of Gemistos' audience: Grigorio Tifernate,¹⁹ who later taught Greek in Paris and translated Strabo, perhaps at Gemistos' suggestion. But it is a reasonable presumption that both Toscanelli and Pietro Vitali would have taken the opportunity of listening to Gemistos' exposition of Greek philosophy, just as Ugo Benzi had done at Ferrara.

Toscanelli had a wide range of intellectual interests, which included the study of Plato. But the only conversation with him that Gemistos recorded was on geography rather than philosophy. Gemistos introduced the work of Strabo to Toscanelli, who showed him in return a map of northern Europe which he had received from the Danish geographer, Claudius Clavus.²⁰ Toscanelli was familiar with the work of Ptolemy, which he had criticized, but Strabo was practically unknown in Italy. On the other hand, Toscanelli had a wide knowledge of contemporary geography. He had read Marco Polo's travels, which were still little known more than a century after they were written; and he had met travellers to and from northern Europe, Asia, and Africa. A quarter of a century later he was to write a famous letter to the Portuguese ecclesiastic and physician, Ferdinand Martens of Roritz, which eventually became known to Christopher Columbus and encouraged him to set out across the Atlantic.²¹

It is at least plausible to suggest, since Toscanelli certainly met Gemistos and since in his old age he was associated with the Platonic Academy, that he probably attended Gemistos' lectures. But as with

¹⁹ Marcus Antonius Antimachus, Preface to translation of Gemistos' *De gestis Graecorum* (Basle 1540): 'Illum dico Gemistum . . . cuius sermonibus cum olim se dedisset Tifernas praeceptor tuus ad eum scientiae gradum pervenerat.' The translation is dedicated to Antimachus' father (Tifernate's pupil). See also Kieszkowski, 20, 39 n.

²⁰ Diller (1937), 447. See p. 183 below.

²¹ M. V. Anastos, 'Pletho, Strabo and Columbus', in *Mélanges Grégoire* (Brussels 1953), iv. 1-17.

every other contemporary, except the celebrated Cosimo de' Medici and the little-known Grigorio Tifernate, the suggestion can be no more than conjectural on the basis of circumstantial evidence. There is one other name about which the circumstantial evidence is equally strong, Lionardo Bruni. His acquaintance with Gemistos, which could be assumed in any case from his strong interest in Plato, is confirmed by the discovery of an essay by Bruni on the Florentine Republic, written in Greek in his own hand with corrections in Gemistos' handwriting.²² It has even been suggested that Bruni knew the works of Plato better than Gemistos himself,²³ but that is an exaggeration of which Bruni would not have been guilty.

For the rest of Gemistos' audience, only limited conjecture is possible. Circumstantial evidence amounts to no more than the knowledge that certain identifiable men, with an interest in Greek studies, were present in Florence during 1439. They fall into several groups: the native Florentines, both laymen and ecclesiastics; the members of the papal entourage; and the visitors from other cities and states, drawn to Florence by personal interest rather than specific missions to the Council.

The first group—those who had roots in or around Florence—included the immediate family of Cosimo de' Medici and his humanist circle. There were those who, like himself, had studied Greek under Chrysoloras' pupil Roberto de' Rossi: Alessandro Alessandri, Luca degli Albizzi, Domenico Buoninsegni, Bartolo Tebaldi. There were those who frequented Traversari's monastery: Giannozzo Manetti, Carlo Marsuppini, Matteo Palmieri, Ugolino Peruzzi, Franco Sacchetti, Iacopo Tornaquinci, Bartolomeo Valori. Many of these played a part in public life as well as in scholarly circles. Buoninsegni and Peruzzi held many public offices; Manetti was a wealthy businessman and diplomatist; Marsuppini succeeded Bruni as Chancellor of Florence.

Another Florentine family besides the Medici which had special reason to be interested in the Greek visitors was that of the Acciaiuoli. They had been traders in the eastern Mediterranean since early in the fourteenth century. The founder of their political fortunes, Niccolò Acciaiuoli, established himself in the Peloponnese in 1338 as chamberlain of Catherine de Valois, the titular Latin Empress. His son Neri established himself in Athens by conquest over the Catalans in 1388, and was confirmed as the first Duke of Athens by the King of Naples

²² Masai (1954), 548; (1956), 68.

²³ G. Voigt, *op. cit.*, ii. 121.

in 1394. He was succeeded by an illegitimate son of a Greek mother, and then in 1435 by Neri II, a kinsman, who had been born in Athens. But in 1439 Neri II was expelled from Athens by his brother and took refuge in Florence. Being bilingual in Greek and Latin, he might well have taken an interest in Gemistos; so too might his kinsman Angelo, who had recently returned to Florence after a period of exile in Cephallonia. He had been exiled as an adherent of Cosimo de' Medici, and now he was close to the humanist circle in Florence, as a friend of Traversari, Manetti, and Bruni. His interest in Greek philosophy is confirmed by many sources.

Other names can be added with greater or less plausibility. But a cautionary example can be drawn from one particular case. Vespasiano da Bisticci was a celebrated dealer in Greek and Latin manuscripts, who was certainly at Florence in 1439. His *Lives of Illustrious Men* is a valuable source-book on the personalities of fifteenth-century Florence. He was particularly interested in the Council of Union, and included a number of Greeks in his character-sketches. But he made no mention of Gemistos. Whatever interest was caused by Gemistos' lectures passed him by entirely.

It is also necessary to be cautious about the potential audience of young Florentines. Although its existence is indubitable, it is impossible to say with certainty who was actually in Florence at the time. The further list consists for the most part only of possibilities. There were those who later became founding members of the Platonic Academy, such as Benedetto Accolti and Pietro dei Pazzi. There were the collectors of Greek manuscripts, such as Andrea Alamanni and Cristoforo Buondelmonti. There were students and friends of Filelfo, such as Niccolò della Luna, Andrea Quaratesi, Antonio Rossi, Veri Salviati, and Sassuolo of Prato. There were scholarly amateurs like Bartolomeo da Montepulciano and Giulio Davanzati. There were young men fascinated by the prospect of travel in the East, like Benedetto Dei.

If it were possible to single out individual humanists who were more likely than most to be attracted by Gemistos' lectures, they would be those already interested in Neoplatonic theories, such as Matteo Palmieri, or inclined to an open contempt for religion, such as Carlo Marsuppini. But for just the same reason there were leading ecclesiastics who would have frowned on the discussions initiated by Gemistos. In the previous generation Cardinal Giovanni Dominici had attacked the whole humanist movement as inspired by paganism. At the time of

the Council two saintly figures were present in Florence—both of them later to be canonized—whose judgement would have been influential: Bernardino of Siena and Antonino Pierozzi, a future Archbishop of Florence. Both disapproved of the humanists, and in later years Antonino warned the young Marsilio Ficino not to confine his studies to Plato but to study Aquinas as well, lest he lapse into paganism.

Yet the humanists also had their supporters in the Church, many of whom were present in Florence during the Council. There were monks such as Ambrogio Traversari and Pietro Vitali, both of whom, though naturally educated in the Aristotelian tradition, were also students of Plato. There were priests and cardinals, such as Cesarini, who learned Greek from Traversari, and Domenico Capranica, a former pupil of Cesarini and like him an admirer of Bessarion.²⁴ There were humanists even in the papal entourage, both lay and clerical. Among them were Tommaso Parentucelli, the future Pope Nicholas V; Antonio degli Agli, later Archbishop of Ragusa; Cristoforo Garatoni, the Latin bishop of Koroni, who acted as confidential interpreter between the Pope and the Patriarch. The lay members of the Curia included Flavio Biondo, the author of *Italia Instaurata*; Cencio Rustici, who had studied under Chrysoloras; Leon Battista Alberti, the famous architect and polymath; and others from other nations, including northern Europe.

Lastly, there were visitors from elsewhere, drawn to Florence by general interest. Some were casual tourists, like Pero Tafur. Some names are speculative: for example, Bartolomeo Facio, a pupil of Guarino later employed at Genoa, whose movements in 1439 are undocumented; but the vivid terms in which he praised Secundinus' interpreting 'at the Council of Florence' suggest that he was present.²⁵ Most are unknown, for the number of Latins who came to the Council was said to be near 700. Two who can be identified are of particular interest: Francesco Barbaro from Venice and Cyriac of Ancona.

Francesco Barbaro was one of the earliest humanists at Venice, where Greek studies lagged behind Florence until near the end of the century. A pupil of both Chrysoloras and Guarino, and a friend of Cosimo de' Medici, he led an active public life as well as collecting Greek and Latin manuscripts, indulging in literary and scholarly debates, and conducting a voluminous correspondence. At Florence in 1439 he held no official position, but warmly supported the Union.

²⁴ Mohler, i. 208.

²⁵ B. Facius, *De viris illustribus*, ed. L. Mehus (Florence 1745), 21-2.

He would presumably not have missed the chance of listening to Gemistos.

The same can be said with even more confidence about Cyriac of Ancona, who had made Gemistos' acquaintance during his first visit to Mistra in 1437, and perhaps helped to persuade the old man to come to Italy. Cyriac was certainly at Florence in 1439, attracted by the Council. His interest was not in theological debate—he was at heart a pagan, like Gemistos—but in the idea of a crusade against the Turks, which he enthusiastically endorsed. He was already acquainted with Bessarion and Lionardo Bruni; during the Council he came to know the Emperor John and Cardinal Cesarini, with both of whom he later corresponded.²⁶ There is no positive evidence that he attended Gemistos' lectures, nor would he have been intellectually qualified to appreciate them. But as the only Italian who could claim an earlier acquaintance with Gemistos, so far as is known, he would surely not have missed the opportunity.

Cyriac's case is only one form of the wider problem of comprehension between Gemistos and his audience. Few of the Italian humanists were expert in philosophy, and equally few were proficient in Greek. Since it is improbable that Gemistos could have addressed them in Latin, he must have depended on interpreters. There was a number of bilingual Greeks and Latins at Florence, but most of them must have been engaged at the Council.

Among the laymen who were less fully engaged, some would have been reluctant to translate for Gemistos: for example, George Trapezuntius, Theodore Gazis, and Scholarios. Some, who were more sympathetic towards him, such as Argyropoulos, were not yet sufficiently masters of Latin. Aurispa, Guarino, and Secundinus could have been helpful if they had sufficient leisure from their official work at the Council. So could some of the learned monks, such as Vitali, Traversari, and perhaps Bessarion.

There is no way that the question can be conclusively settled. Perhaps, however, the most probable intermediary would have been Bruni himself. Having already translated many works of both Plato and Aristotle, he would at least have had less difficulty than most in finding technical terms to reconcile the divergences of the two languages and systems of thought, which were also perplexing the interpreters at the Council.

In the last analysis, there can be no certain answers to the questions,

²⁶ Bodnar, 48-9, 50-1 n. 5.

how did Gemistos communicate, and precisely to whom? But some indirect light on the nature and reactions of his audience is shed by the controversy which broke out between him and Scholarios after their return to Greece. In the work known as the *Defence of Aristotle*, written probably in 1443-4 in reply to Gemistos' *De Differentiis*, Scholarios criticized the Italian humanists in these words:

We know who the Platonists were who were recently worsted in Italy, for whose benefit he says that he conceived the idea of writing such an essay. Many people saw them there in his company—men who know as much about philosophy as he knows about dancing.²⁷

He went on to say that these men were familiar with Homer and Virgil, and some of them had a slight knowledge of Cicero and Demosthenes. Captivated by Plato's artistry, they assumed that philosophy consisted of no more than that, or at most of philological argument. They were therefore incompetent to judge between Plato and Aristotle. But, he continued:

those in the West who have really studied philosophical theory do not share the views of the Platonists. They are probably more numerous than the Platonists, and I myself met not a few of them.²⁸

Gemistos rebutted these criticisms in his *Reply*, written probably five or six years later in 1448-9. To Scholarios' first point he replied with brutal brevity:

These men should certainly enjoy your calumny on ourself, being much better qualified than you are in every branch of philosophy, and also your intellectual superiors. For you are not only vindictive but dull-witted, as your present work shows; and you are ignorant even of the doctrines of Aristotle, in which you purport to be quite somebody. This will become clear as the argument proceeds.²⁹

To Scholarios' second point his reply was longer. It may be summarized as follows. Scholarios had not in fact consorted with the western philosophers at all. It was notorious that he avoided them, obviously in order not to expose the falsity of his self-esteem. If he did occasionally meet some of them, he was clearly incompetent to understand their reasoning, in which they were greatly his superiors, even if they were somewhat deficient in precise accuracy. The best of them, such as Peter of Calabria (Pietro Vitali) and Ugo (Benzi), criticized their own compatriots in this respect. He concluded:

How could those who have no adequate understanding of Aristotle and are perfectly ignorant of Plato and his doctrines, except what they have learned of

²⁷ Scholarios, iv. 4. 3-6.

²⁸ Ibid. 4. 11-14.

²⁹ PG 160, 981 C-2 A.

the latter from Aristotle's falsifications and misrepresentation, be competent judges of the two men? The fact is that you appear to rely on the opinions of people who pass judgement without hearing what the two philosophers actually say, since even in Italy those who have sampled Plato much prefer him to Aristotle.³⁰

The meaning of these passages is clear. Gemistos was consorting with the humanists, whom Scholarios regarded as amateurs. Scholarios was consorting with the scholastics, who in Gemistos' opinion did not rightly understand Aristotle, let alone Plato. So it is clear who were likely to have formed Gemistos' audiences, although it cannot be inferred that all upholders of the scholastic tradition deliberately absented themselves from his lectures. At the same time it is fair to concede that there was some truth in Scholarios' criticisms, as well as some in Gemistos' reply to them. If the exchange of insults seems unworthy of philosophical debate, it must be remembered that it was started by Scholarios, who was much the younger of the two men.

Scholarios, however, by his own account was aware of a major element of hypocrisy in Gemistos' lectures, which was not apparent to his Italian audience. Ostensibly Gemistos was defending Plato against the criticisms of Aristotle. Incidentally he was also arguing that in important respects Plato's philosophy was more consistent with Christian doctrine than Aristotle's. At the same time, however, he was reviving by implication the heresies of earlier Byzantine Platonists, such as Michael Psellos and John Italos in the eleventh century. Scholarios had no doubt that Gemistos' intention was to subvert the Christian faith. As he wrote after Gemistos' death, 'we had no quarrel with Plato nor any special concern for Aristotle, but because we resented Gemistos' real object, we undertook a task which would otherwise have been superfluous, out of zeal for the faith'.³¹

Like Psellos and Italos, Gemistos gave the primacy to philosophy over theology. Religion was merely one possible subject of philosophical study. Recognizing that a powerful instinct in man requires some kind of religious faith, he nevertheless regarded it as absurd to believe that this instinct could only be satisfied by one faith rather than another. To prove his point, he invented a religion of his own, which he presented, to a limited circle only, as a revived form of the Olympian religion of ancient Greece, though in fact it was much more. According to Scholarios he had begun to formulate it even earlier than the journey to Italy. Writing after Gemistos' death, Scholarios claimed

³⁰ Ibid. 982 c.

³¹ Scholarios, iv. 156. 4-7.

to have known about it because 'many trustworthy people had told us so, and we had realized it ourselves from many clear indications, first in the Peloponnese and later in Italy'.³²

There is no evidence that Gemistos revealed any hint of this innovation to his Italian acquaintances, but at least one other Greek in Italy claimed to have been aware of his secret. George Trapezuntius, always a hostile witness against Gemistos, wrote two accounts of what he knew about Gemistos' religious beliefs. In the first, written two years after Gemistos' death, he said that 'while he was alive, he preached that in a few years after his death all nations would revert to the true theology of Plato'.³³ In the second account, written about a year later, in 1455, he said more explicitly:

It is known that he was so much a Platonist that he claimed that nothing other than what Plato believed about the gods, the soul, sacrifices to the gods or daemons, and all the rest, great and small, was true, and he dared to write it without restraint. I myself heard him at Florence—for he came to the Council with the Greeks—asserting that the whole world would in a few years adopt one and the same religion, with one mind, one intelligence, one teaching. And when I asked: 'Christ's or Muhammad's?' he replied: 'Neither, but one not differing from paganism.' I was so shocked by these words that I hated him ever after and feared him like a poisonous viper, and I could no longer bear to see or hear him. I heard, too, from a number of Greeks who escaped here from the Peloponnese that he openly said, about three years before his death, that not many years after his death both Muhammad and Christ would be forgotten and the real truth would shine through on all the shores of the world.³⁴

Trapezuntius' story has been called fictitious, but without good reason.³⁵ Gemistos' heterodoxy was by no means an impossible outcome of his study of Neoplatonism and his indoctrination by Elissaeus. Although it took an unusual and extreme form in his case, heterodoxy was not uncommon among fifteenth-century intellectuals in the East and West alike, both Christian and Muslim. It sometimes took the form of a belief that there was a common substratum to all religions, especially Christianity and Islam. There were both Latins and Turks in Gemistos' lifetime who shared this belief, which was of course vigorously resisted by the religious establishments.

If there were a common substratum to all religions, it would be natural to identify it with the oldest known form of religion. Hence Gemistos, who had no idea of the comparative antiquity of religions,

³² Scholarios iv. 155. 32-156. 1.

³³ Mohler, iii. 340. 21-2.

³⁴ Legrand (1962), iii. 287; Alexandre, p. xvi n. 1.

³⁵ Knös, 97.

looked to Zoroaster, Moses, and various legendary Greeks as the nominal sources of his system. But he formulated its content in terms of what he believed to be the oldest surviving religion, and also the best known to him, which was the Olympian religion of his ancestors, including its pre-Olympian core. This reversion to paganism on his part was deliberately provocative, but it was not mere foolishness.

However much the Olympian religion had become corrupted, it had once appealed to one of the most sophisticated peoples in the world. Nor had it ever completely disappeared. It had been briefly resuscitated by the Emperor Julian the Apostate—a Platonist like Gemistos—in the fourth century. It appealed to both high and low in the Empire. It had secret adherents among intellectuals long after paganism had been outlawed. Peasants in remote areas of the Empire continued to practise pagan rituals for generations. The constant renewal of legislation against paganism, down to the compilation of Harmenopoulos' *Hexabiblos* in the fourteenth century, shows the vigour of its survival. There were undoubtedly serious contemporaries of Gemistos both in the East and West who shared his heresies.

But only the suspicious eye of knowledgeable men like Scholarios and Trapezuntius could have detected his heresies in the text of his lectures. As will be seen in the full translation of *De Differentiis* in Chapter XI, the central point in Gemistos' argument was that Plato could be more easily reconciled with Christianity than Aristotle. The latter, he suggested, was even 'inclined towards atheism'.³⁶ Although he stopped short of actually calling Aristotle an atheist, his argument was highly unorthodox in Greek eyes, and to the Latins it must have been a severe shock. Western theologians had been convinced by Aquinas that Aristotelianism was compatible with Christian dogma. There had, it was true, been times in the thirteenth century when first Aristotle and later even Aquinas had been regarded as heretical; but those suspicions had long since been overcome. Now Gemistos claimed to show that Aristotle regarded the world as eternal and uncreated in time, and that he denied by implication the role of God as creator.³⁷ If all this were true, Aristotelianism might once again have to be condemned as heretical.

This argument was so tightly interwoven with Gemistos' exposition of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy that it cannot have escaped his listeners. That Scholarios was aware of the implications is clear, if only indirectly, from Filelfo's letter to him of 29 March, congratulating

³⁶ Lagarde, 332. 14-18.

³⁷ Id. 321-2.

him on having defended Aristotle against misrepresentation.³⁸ But neither he nor Trapezuntius tried to discredit Gemistos' arguments by exposing him as a heretic in his turn.

To have done so would have exposed the Greek delegation to humiliation as well, by association. There was a special reason not to take that risk. Platonism, or Neoplatonism—a distinction which no one drew in the fifteenth century—had been one of the contributory elements in Hesychasm. The Hesychast controversy a century earlier had been in some respects a contest between Platonists and Aristotelians. In 1355 a Latin archbishop, Paul of Smyrna, who had come to Constantinople to discuss Union, had reported that the Greek Church was teaching a theory of 'higher and lower divinities', which was essentially Neoplatonic.³⁹ A modern historian of Greek philosophy has similarly described the Hesychast doctrine of the uncreated light flowing from God and uniting man with him as 'the last manifestation of Neoplatonic emanation'.⁴⁰ Those Greek intellectuals who supported Palamas tended to be Platonists. Those who attacked Hesychasm, especially Barlaam, did so on Aristotelian principles.

The Greek delegation at Florence was anxious not to reopen this controversy in the presence of the Latins. In the event they were unable to avoid it entirely, but at least they need not bring it on themselves, which might have been the unavoidable consequence if a direct attack were made on Gemistos. So, for whatever reason, Gemistos' provocative challenge to Aristotelianism passed without a counter-challenge to his own orthodoxy. He continued to enjoy himself with the Florentine humanists, while the scholastics and the orthodox had more immediate problems on their minds.

³⁸ Legrand (1892), 31.

³⁹ PG 154, 837 A.

⁴⁰ Tatakis, 271.

X

FLORENCE 1439

THE proceedings of the Council at Florence were slow at first, as they had been at Ferrara, and even more painful for the Greeks. Although they arrived at Florence on 7 February 1439, the first formal session did not take place until the 26th. As usual, the delay was due to the Greeks. They had agreed before they left Ferrara that they would discuss the question of the *Filioque*, but they had not agreed among themselves what they would say about it.¹

By this stage the pro-Unionists had the upper hand, but the *Filioque* was a formidable obstacle. The Emperor was determined on a positive result, which could only mean Union. He was a keen and competent theologian himself, and he was strongly supported by Bessarion and Amiroutzes, who took the lead among the ecclesiastics and the laymen respectively. The Patriarch favoured Union simply on grounds of expediency, according to Syropoulos.² Only a small minority, including Syropoulos by his own account, and perhaps Scholarios, still supported Mark Eugenikos in opposition.³ Gemistos had not committed himself personally, though he recognized that Union was the inevitable outcome.

There were ugly scenes among the Greeks both in public and in private. At Ferrara Gregorios Mammias (a future Patriarch) and Amiroutzes had openly mocked Eugenikos while he was actually addressing the Council.⁴ At Florence Bessarion attacked Eugenikos in private and forbade Syropoulos to open his mouth.⁵ Together with Isidore and Gregorios Mammias, Bessarion manoeuvred the Emperor into agreements which, according to Syropoulos, he had never intended.⁶ Gregorios Mammias had special authority as he was the Patriarch's personal confessor. He told a young deacon who dared to defend Eugenikos: 'If I don't tell the Emperor to have one of you burnt, there will be no end to the evil!'⁷

The omens, which were taken seriously, were almost all unfavourable. Two shooting stars which appeared with trails of smoke were

¹ Syropoulos, viii. 11-15.

² Id. viii. 28; ix. 17; ix. 38.

³ Id. ix. 34-7; Zisis, 148-50.

⁴ Syropoulos, vi. 42.

⁵ Id. ix. 11.

⁶ Id. x. 1.

⁷ Id. x. 20.

later interpreted as forecasting the deaths of the Emperor's wife Maria and the widow of his cousin and namesake, John VII.⁸ (These deaths occurred while the delegation was in Italy, but were still unknown.) The Emperor's pet dog whined incessantly while he was speaking in favour of Union at a private meeting.⁹ The pressure on the Emperor to allow the delegation to break off negotiations and return home began to grow again. He felt obliged to communicate it to the Pope, perhaps to obtain concessions, but he insisted that he would not give way to it.¹⁰ He kept his party under close control, asking the authorities at Florence, as he had done at Ferrara, to prevent any Greek from leaving town without permission. Even Bessarion, who can hardly have intended to escape, was prevented from riding out one night.¹¹

The Emperor was equally domineering in debate. 'I am the Defender of the Church', he declared (using the Latin term *Defensor*).¹² He showed a violent temper towards the Patriarch or any other bishop (except Mark Eugenikos) who spoke against the Union. He demanded that everyone should support the final decision, even those who voted against it.¹³ He mobilized the votes of the laymen, even down to 'tailors, doctors and his Cretan *valet de chambre*', because he knew they would support him; but he refused to let the Abbots vote, because he knew they were against him.¹⁴ Only Eugenikos held out to the last, even under the threat of anathema and excommunication.¹⁵ All this rests, however, solely on the word of Syropoulos, a prejudiced witness who had a guilty conscience because he had yielded and signed the decree of Union himself.

Despite his other more interesting preoccupations, Gemistos still had an occasional role to play in the affairs of the Council. An attempt was made to reconcile the Greek and Latin positions on the *Filioque* by a proposal to substitute 'through the Son' for 'from the Son' in the formula on the Procession of the Holy Spirit. Bessarion and Isidore recommended that this compromise should be accepted. Mark Eugenikos was opposed, as were most of the bishops. A bitter debate ensued between Bessarion and Eugenikos on the meanings of the words *ἐκ* (from) and *διὰ* (through). Bessarion said that they meant the same, Eugenikos denied it. The Emperor, who naturally supported Bessarion, called for a vote by secret ballot, but the debate could not be stifled.¹⁶

⁸ Syropoulos, xi. 20.

¹¹ Id. viii. 10.

¹⁴ Id. ix. 21.

⁹ Id. ix. 23.

¹² Id. viii. 11.

¹⁵ Id. ix. 10; x. 9.

¹⁰ Id. viii. 18-19; viii. 21.

¹³ Id. ix. 29.

¹⁶ Id. viii. 31-7.

Finally the Emperor appointed a committee to prepare a new draft. Its members were Bessarion, Isidore, Gemistos, Scholarios, and the Grand Chartophylax (archivist) of the Church. Scholarios prepared the new draft, declaring that the Holy Spirit proceeded 'from the Father through the Son'. Bessarion and Isidore approved it, but Gemistos and the Grand Chartophylax rejected it.¹⁷ The Emperor nevertheless ordered that a vote be taken on it. A majority was found in favour of Scholarios' draft, which was accordingly sent to the Latins. But the Pope in turn rejected it, and retorted with a dozen pointed questions.¹⁸ The one certainty now was that whatever agreement was finally reached, a substantial proportion of the Greeks would eventually repudiate it.

There was little more for Gemistos to do at the Council, which was moving towards its inevitable conclusion. In the final stages the Emperor, supported by Bessarion and Isidore, overrode all opposition except that of Mark Eugenikos. Although the evidence of their domination of the Greek delegation comes chiefly from Syropoulos, there is some independent confirmation. Gemistos himself, for example, wrote in a letter to Bessarion some years later that Eugenikos had never been defeated in argument, only commanded to be silent, 'so that your party could carry through your plans in default of an adversary'.¹⁹ These stern words from a former teacher to a former pupil corroborate Syropoulos' account of the pressure put upon Mark Eugenikos. At one point when Gemistos tried to defend him, he was abused in his turn by Amiroutzes. 'Everyone was amazed', wrote Syropoulos, 'that the Emperor did not thereupon rebuke Amiroutzes for his insolence, nor did he say a word of consolation to the good Gemistos.'²⁰

The rest of the Greek delegation gave way more easily. Between March and June 1439 they were harangued in turn by Bessarion, Isidore, Cesarini, the Pope, and the Emperor. All impressed upon the Greeks the importance of agreeing to the Union. Scholarios was also reputed to have addressed them to the same effect. The text of his statement survives, along with other addresses attributed to him at the Council. But in so far as these appear to express support for the Union on Latin terms without qualification, they have been challenged as probably spurious.²¹

In any case the eventual outcome was hardly in doubt. The credit

¹⁷ Id. viii. 39-40.

¹⁸ Id. viii. 41-3.

¹⁹ Alexandre, 311-12.

²⁰ Syropoulos, ix. 12.

²¹ Scholarios, i. 295-372; Zisis, 394-420.

for devising a formula which reconciled the two sides was shared by Bessarion and Traversari.²² It established that since all the Saints, both eastern and western, were equally inspired by the Holy Spirit, their doctrines must in fact be in agreement even if their words were different. This was the compromise which the Greek delegates were finally required to accept. Only Mark Eugenikos refused.²³

Although Gemistos had defended Eugenikos in his last recorded contribution to the debate, he must himself have given at least a nominal adherence to the Unionist side. For on 4 June the Emperor required every member of the Greek delegation, including 'all our learned men and philosophers', to state formally in writing his view on the *Filioque*.²⁴ It is recorded that all except Mark Eugenikos were in favour of the compromise by which the Latin 'from the Son' and the Greek 'through the Son' were deemed identical in meaning.

A few of the formal declarations have survived, including that of Amiroutzes²⁵ and one attributed to Scholarios.²⁶ Gemistos' declaration has not, though it must be assumed that he made one. It has been suggested that his may have been similar to the surviving statement by Manuel Tarchaniotes Boullotes, a nobleman at court.²⁷ This accepted the compromise simply on the grounds that it had been accepted by the Emperor and the Patriarch, and that it was necessary to secure western aid. It has the appearance of having been dictated to the signatory. Gemistos would have found no difficulty in signing such a document, which he would have regarded as a logical statement of fact.

There were still a number of points to be cleared up even after the matter of the *Filioque* was settled. There were points of convention and practice, such as the use of leavened or unleavened bread, the wearing or shaving of beards. There were doctrinal points such as the nature of Purgatory, the form of the Eucharist, the *ἐπίκλησις* (invocation) of the Holy Spirit at the consecration of the Host. There were political points, such as the primacy of the Pope and the future of the Latin bishoprics in Greece. The Latins even touched on the awkward subject of Hesychasm. For the Greeks the most important of these points—and the one which had been central to the schism of 1054—was

²² Syropoulos, x. 5.

²³ Gill (1959), 291-2.

²⁴ Ibid. 260-1.

²⁵ M. Jugie, 'La profession de foi de Georges Amiroutzès au Concile de Florence', *Échos d'Orient*, 36 (1937), 175-80.

²⁶ Scholarios, i. 372-4.

²⁷ V. Laurent, 'La profession de foi de Manuel Tarchaniotès Boullotès', *Revue des études byzantines*, 10 (1952), 60-9.

the Catholic use of unleavened bread, which they regarded as a relic of the Passover and therefore tainted with Judaism. For the Latins the crucial point was the primacy of the Pope, not least because it had been repudiated by the Council of Basle.²⁸

Several days of fruitless and often acrimonious discussion were devoted to these subjects. But the Emperor was determined that they should not delay or prevent the signature of the decree of Union. In fact each party intended in any case to retain its own practices and beliefs on the disputed points. The primacy of the Pope need not have any significance in Constantinople; so provided that recognition of it in theory led to material and military aid, there was no harm in it. Apart from the Emperor's insistence, it was also rumoured that bribery played a part in securing the Greeks' final acquiescence; but this was indignantly denied by Syropoulos.²⁹

During the final stages of the Council, the Patriarch Joseph II died on 10 June, and was buried in Santa Maria Novella. The Emperor resisted pressure to replace him at once, ostensibly because he wanted to consult his mother.³⁰ The most probable candidate for the succession was the bishop of Cyzicus, Metrophanes, who had secretly promised to support the Union. But he was deterred from immediate acceptance by unfavourable omens—the unexplained loss of two of his sacred treasures, and the drowning of a sailor rowing him out to a ship at Venice.³¹ In the end Metrophanes was to be elected, but only after the return of the Greeks to Constantinople.

Meanwhile Bessarion and Traversari were busy at the work of drafting, and the Council was beginning to break up. The Despot Demetrios, with Scholarios and Gemistos, left Florence after the Patriarch's funeral.³² They did so not to avoid signing the decree, which as laymen they would not have been expected to do, but simply as a gesture of disapproval. Scholarios later congratulated Demetrios on the gesture, which he knew displeased the Emperor.³³ The final ceremonies of the Council took place on 5 and 6 July. Most of the Greeks had not seen the decree until they were required to sign it on the 6th.³⁴ The Pope was furious when he learned that Eugenikos had refused to sign. 'Then we have achieved nothing!' he exclaimed.³⁵ He took his revenge by refusing to attend the liturgy to be celebrated in

²⁸ Gill (1959), 280-2, 288-9.

²⁹ Syropoulos, x. 8; x. 26.

³⁰ Id. ix. 38; x. 24.

³¹ Id. xi. 1-2.

³² Id. ix. 25.

³³ Scholarios, iii. 118. 13-18, 126. 23-5.

³⁴ Syropoulos, x. 29.

³⁵ Id. x. 15.

Greek. Although he permitted two Cardinals to attend, the Emperor preferred to cancel it.³⁶

It was not entirely true that nothing had been achieved, for many of the eastern churches later accepted the Union, and the majority of them never renounced it.³⁷ But the Greeks and the Russians were the ones who mattered. The Latins tactlessly put up a plaque above the spot in the Duomo of Florence where the Decree was signed, stating that it was 'here that the Greeks renounced their errors'. Still more tactlessly, they regularly referred to the Union as *Reductio*.

The Greeks began to have doubts almost at once. On their way back to Venice, they were met at Bologna by an embassy from England, which was not concerned with the business of the Council but closely questioned the Greeks about it. Their conclusion, according to Syropoulos, was that 'it cannot properly be called a Union'.³⁸ This view persisted through the Reformation: when the first Latin translation of Syropoulos' *Memoirs* was made two centuries later by an Anglican bishop, Robert Creyghton, it was published under the title *Vera Historia Unionis Non Verae*.

The Russian reaction was similar. When Isidore returned home in 1441, as a Cardinal like Bessarion, he was repudiated by his clergy and imprisoned by the Grand Duke of Moscow. He escaped with difficulty, and made his way back to Rome. Although he made valiant efforts at reconciliation, and fought in the final battle for Constantinople, his efforts, like the Union itself, were doomed to failure.³⁹ There was no prospect that the Pope could launch a crusade to save the Greeks, since most of the secular rulers of Europe were either neutral or supported the Council of Basle, which was still in session and elected its anti-Pope shortly after the Pope's Council dispersed.

For the Greeks, the return home was depressing. Demetrios, Scholarios, and Gemistos had to wait at Venice for the Emperor and the rest of the Greeks, since travel down the Adriatic was not easily arranged. They sailed only on 19 October, nearly three months after the last Greeks left the Council. So they had the opportunity, if they wished, to attend the first celebration of the Greek liturgy in San Marco. After much squabbling over the propriety of a service in a Latin Church, it was attended by Demetrios but not the Emperor. Whether Scholarios or Gemistos was present is unknown. The Doge attended, and the *Filioque* was omitted.⁴⁰ Thus, not for the last time,

³⁶ Syropoulos, x. 17.

³⁸ Syropoulos, x. 27.

³⁷ Gill (1959), 323, 326, 335, 338.

³⁹ Gill (1959), 383-8.

⁴⁰ Syropoulos, xi. 5-9.

the Greeks found Venice more accommodating than Florence or Rome. But when the time came to depart, the Greeks could find no Venetians to man their ships, and they had to be content with Russian and Bulgarian slaves, who had no experience of the sea.⁴¹

There were more painful scenes on their way home. At one port after another—Corfu, Methoni, Euboea, and Constantinople—they were received with hostility on account of their surrender at the Council.⁴² Their most courteous reception was from the Turkish governor of Gallipoli.⁴³ At Lemnos they learned of the death of the Emperor's wife. No one dared to tell him, knowing how much he depended on her advice and support.⁴⁴

Already many of the signatories of the decree of Union were having second thoughts. Syropoulos, who had signed with reluctance, wrote in his *Memoirs*: 'We are not obliged to approve the Union nor to defend what was done: we look only to the advantage of our own soul.'⁴⁵ Such was the egocentricity of Greek monks. Gemistos wrote contemptuously in a later letter to Bessarion that 'all except a very few' had recanted.⁴⁶ Personally he was indifferent to the outcome.

Presumably he left the convoy at Methoni to return to Mistra; so he would have been spared much of the agony of the aftermath. Strange as it may seem in the case of a man who was already around eighty years of age, the experience of Italy had been a turning-point in his life. It had little to do with the Council, which he attended only perfunctorily. What he learned from its fruitless wrangling was no more than that Christianity in any form could provide no basis for the Greek renaissance he dreamed of. Outside the Council, however, he had enjoyed an intellectual stimulus which gave rise to the most important writings of his life.

He was confirmed in his intention to formulate a new or revived religion, which Scholarios believed to have been in his mind if not on paper before the journey to Italy. But first, before leaving Florence, he had summarized his lectures in *De Differentiis*. He seems also to have indulged in other discussions and compositions while he was in Italy or very soon afterwards. Among these may be counted some poems and two essays on very different topics: one on the well-worn

⁴¹ Id. xi. 11.

⁴² Id. xi. 13-21; xii. 1.

⁴³ Id. xi. 22.

⁴⁴ Id. xi. 20.

⁴⁵ Id. xii. 13.

⁴⁶ Alexandre, 311-12.

conventional theme of the Virtues (*De Virtutibus*)⁴⁷ and one on Strabo's *Geographica*.⁴⁸

A minor curiosity of Gemistos' period in Florence is on record thanks to the Italian Hellenist, Marcus Antonius Antimachus, who was born in 1473. His knowledge of Gemistos, although posthumous, was soundly based, for his father had sent him to study at Mistra under John Moschos, Gemistos' pupil and successor as a teacher. The father, who was a warm admirer of Gemistos, urged his son to translate some of his works, which he did. The influence of both Moschos and his father evidently led the young Antimachus to acquire some familiarity with the works of Gemistos, in so far as these were available to readers early in the sixteenth century.

In a work on poets of the period, published in the middle of the sixteenth century, Antimachus is quoted as saying that at Florence Gemistos had 'amused himself from time to time with verses, which were indeed worthy of so great a philosopher, though somewhat few'.⁴⁹ None were quoted by Antimachus, who evidently meant no irony in so describing Gemistos' verses. But those which survive from Gemistos' hand could hardly have been written for amusement. These are the Hymns, composed in hexameters, which he included in his *Book of Laws*. They are not few, and most are of very poor quality; they often ignore the classical rules of prosody. It is questionable whether Antimachus could ever have read them, but it is possible that he rated them as poetry on the basis of hearsay.

He was not alone in giving Gemistos credit for poetic inspiration. George Trapezuntius, the most hostile of critics, wrote after Gemistos' death that he had composed some hymns to the Sun which contained heretical doctrines, skilfully concealed. He highly praised their 'elegance of language, suavity of composition, sonority of metre, and the happy congruity of form and subject'.⁵⁰ He gave no clue to the date of these works. Although some of the Hymns to the gods incorporated in the *Book of Laws* contain passages addressed to the Sun, one of which was admiringly quoted by Kabakes,⁵¹ there is hardly a single respect in which they correspond to Trapezuntius' description. Unless one assumes that Trapezuntius' ear for poetry was very easily pleased, Gemistos' poetic activity at Florence remains a mystery. But

⁴⁷ PG 160, 865-82.

⁴⁸ Diller (1937), 441-51.

⁴⁹ Lilius Gregorius Gyrardus, *De poetis nostrorum temporum*, ed. Karl Wotke (Berlin 1894), 48-9.

⁵⁰ Trapezuntius, book iii, penultimate chapter.

⁵¹ H. Grégoire, *Byzantion*, 5 (1929), 733. See p. 35 above.

at least it gives an indication that his mind was not entirely closed to purely literary composition.

The surviving essay *On Virtues* cannot be exactly dated, but there are some indications that it may have been written in Italy. The most precise clue lies in the existence of a manuscript of the essay copied by John Eugenikos on shipboard while returning from Italy in 1439.⁵² This gives only a *terminus ante quem*, and some scholars have placed the work a few years earlier, between 1433 and 1437; but it may be wondered why John Eugenikos should have had a copy in his possession at that particular date unless it was a product of the visit to Italy. He had taken his leave from Ferrara in September 1438 because he shared his brother's suspicions about the Council. His first attempt to sail for home from Venice was thwarted by shipwreck, and it was not until May 1439 that he succeeded in sailing from Ancona. He could therefore hardly have had Gemistos' text with him if it were composed at Florence; and these facts equally dispose of the theory that *On Virtues* was written after 1439.⁵³ So the probability is that if it was a product of Gemistos' visit to Italy, it was written at Ferrara.

The style and content of the essay make this a reasonable assumption, for it combines Platonic, Aristotelian, and Christian features—a synthesis well suited to the early mood of the Council. Alexandre classified it as Aristotelian rather than Platonic in style, which led him to regard it as an early work, written before Gemistos turned against Aristotle.⁵⁴ But in fact he was not fundamentally anti-Aristotelian, and it was only in Italy, particularly at Florence, that he was moved to express himself harshly by exasperation at scholastic misinterpretation of Aristotle.

In any case much of the content of the essay is Platonic and Stoic in outlook, going back to the four classical virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. An early editor also claimed the essay as proof that Gemistos could be 'numbered among the Christians'⁵⁵—a clear allusion to later doubts on the subject. The fact of the matter is that no religion or philosophy could rationally repudiate the theme of the essay. To write it would have been a natural pastime at Ferrara, when Gemistos had not much else to do.

⁵² Knös, 178. On the date of composition, see Mamalakis (1939), 41.

⁵³ Masai (1956), 402 n. 2.

⁵⁴ Alexandre, p. vii n. 1.

⁵⁵ A. Occo, preface to *Georgii Gemisthi Plethonis quatuor virtutum iusta explicatio* (Basle 1552).

Gemistos divides each of the virtues under three sub-headings.⁵⁶ Most of them are associated with man's duty to God as well as to his fellow men. God and the deity (*τὸ θεῖον*) recur frequently throughout the essay. The highest virtue of all is 'reverence of God' (*θεοσέβεια*).⁵⁷ Its purpose is to understand God, not to influence Him. God is described in the Aristotelian phrase as 'immovable' (*ἀκίνητος*); men are urged to share the same attribute.⁵⁸ In a concluding passage, Gemistos appears to reject both reincarnation and resurrection: 'after we die, having acquired a place fitting and appropriate to what we did in our lifetime, we should be much better off still'.⁵⁹ This phrase might have exposed Gemistos to the same criticism as Plato, who was thought by the Church, as a result of similar language in the *Phaedo*, to have denied the resurrection of the body.⁶⁰ But the essay as a whole can be construed as a reasonable attempt to reconcile Christian, Stoic, Platonic, and Aristotelian doctrines. It is sufficiently conventional to call for no detailed analysis.

To Scholarios it might have seemed an exercise in hypocrisy. John Eugenikos, a more innocent soul, evidently found no fault with it. The reaction of Matthew Kamariotes, a pupil of Scholarios, was more remarkable. He was a strict devotee of Orthodoxy, a teacher of theology, and later Grand Rhetor of the Church. When he received a copy of the essay *On Virtues* from Gemistos' friend and disciple, Demetrios Raoul Kabakes, he read it with enthusiastic approval. Clearly he had no reason at that date (presumably in Gemistos' lifetime) to suspect either man of heresy. In his letter of thanks to Kabakes, he wrote of Gemistos in the warmest terms.⁶¹ But after Gemistos' death, Kamariotes used very different language about him, bitterly denouncing him as an atheist and heretic.⁶² The contrast between his two views of Gemistos is striking. It shows that his reading of Gemistos' works up to 1438-9 had left him unaware of the heresies that were to be uncovered later. If such a deception had been the object of the essay *On Virtues*, as it may have been, then Gemistos had evidently succeeded.

⁵⁶ PG 160, 865 B-8 A; 880 D-2 A.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 868 B.

⁶⁰ *Phaedo*, 114 C; A. E. Taylor, *Aristotle* (London 1943), 92.

⁶¹ Legrand (1892), 311-12.

⁶² *Ματθαίου τοῦ Καμαριώτου λόγοι δύο πρὸς Πλήθωνα, περὶ Εἰμαρμένης*, ed. H. Reimarus (Leyden 1721).

⁵⁷ Ibid. 872 B.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 880 C.

Another work, of a very different character, can be linked still more closely with Gemistos' visit to Italy.⁶³ It arose from his discussions with Toscanelli on questions of geography. A somewhat fanciful theory has even been advanced that these discussions had indirectly some bearing on the discovery of America over half a century later, since Gemistos introduced Toscanelli to Strabo's *Geographica* and both Toscanelli and Strabo eventually influenced Christopher Columbus. Strabo, unlike Ptolemy, was virtually unknown in the West in 1439. Possibly the Greeks knew this, for Bessarion had two copies of Strabo in his luggage when he set out from Constantinople. Although these unfortunately had to be left behind at Methoni, it seems that Gemistos filled the gap by summarizing essential parts of Strabo's work and writing a commentary on it. The resultant essay survives in a number of manuscripts, including Gemistos' autograph, which is among the documents bequeathed by Bessarion to the Library of San Marco.

Gemistos' interest in geography was naturally stimulated by his journey to the West. But it was an interest which he already felt to a greater degree than most Greek contemporaries. Both Ptolemy and Strabo were among the classical writers from whose works he made extracts on other occasions besides this one. Manuscripts survive of his *Description of the Entire Peloponnese, Coastal and Inland*, based on Ptolemy;⁶⁴ and of his *Topography of Thessaly*, based on the ninth book of Strabo's *Geographica*.⁶⁵ These cannot be precisely dated, but it must be assumed that Gemistos was knowledgeable about classical geography before he met Toscanelli: otherwise there would have been no point in the meeting. From it arose Gemistos' essay on Strabo, which falls into two parts.

The first part is simply a summary of passages from the second book of the *Geographica*, under the title: *On the Shape of the Inhabited World*.⁶⁶ Since manuscripts of Strabo were few and little studied in the West, it is uncertain whether a copy was available to Gemistos at Florence; so his summary may have been written soon after his return to Greece. His extracts were copious, no doubt because the Italians showed exceptional interest in this little-known work.

⁶³ Diller (1937), 441-51; Diller (1956), 32-3; M. V. Anastos, 'Pletho, Strabo and Columbus', *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves*, 12 (= *Mélanges Grégoire*, iv, Brussels 1953), 1-18.

⁶⁴ PG 160, 777-8, n. (k); and see p. 19 above.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 781-2, n. (q); and see p. 19 above.

⁶⁶ Strabo, *Geographica*, ii. 118-31.

The second part of the essay is called *Correction of Certain Errors made by Strabo*.⁶⁷ Gemistos' criticisms of Strabo are chiefly based on classical authors such as Aristotle, Geminus, and Ptolemy, but there is also an important passage derived from his conversations with Toscanelli. His criticisms are in some cases unfair, since they turn on points which Strabo dealt with more accurately in other parts of his *Geographica*. But Gemistos also gives him high praise for his general accuracy.⁶⁸

Four specific errors are listed. First, Strabo wrongly makes the Caspian Sea flow into the (Atlantic) Ocean. Aristotle's 'conjecture', which Gemistos seems to support, is that the Caspian flows underground into the Black Sea.⁶⁹ Secondly, Strabo wrongly supposes that the torrid zone, through which the Equator runs, is uninhabitable. He assumes five zones: two at the poles, which are frozen and uninhabitable; two temperate zones, north and south; and the torrid zone, which is completely arid. Gemistos shows the absurdity of his argument by pointing out that the Nile must rise south of the Equator, and that Ceylon (Taprobane) extends across the Equator.⁷⁰ Thirdly, Strabo fails to realize that the meridians must converge towards the poles. In other words, he does not appreciate that the world is a globe. Fourthly, Strabo wrongly makes the Nile rather than the Arabian Gulf (Red Sea) the boundary between Libya (Africa) and Asia. Gemistos says that continents should be separated by a sea, not by a river.⁷¹

There follows a passage dealing with northern Europe, about which the knowledge of the Greeks was generally sketchy. Although the Emperor Manuel had visited Britain, as had several of his envoys, accounts of the British Isles by Greek historians contain many absurdities; though Laonikos Chalkokondyles has also some accurate information, especially on the Thames estuary.⁷² Gemistos had little to say about Britain in his essay, but elsewhere he showed that he knew of the island as a source of wool.⁷³ He was better informed about Scandinavia thanks to the Danish geographer Claudius Clavus, about whom he heard at second hand from Toscanelli.⁷⁴ He did not have the benefit of a first-hand account of Scandinavia by the historian John Kananos, who had not yet returned from northern Europe.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Diller (1937), 442-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 446.

⁶⁹ *Meteorologica*, i. 351^a8-13.

⁷⁰ M. V. Anastos, 'Pletho and Strabo on the Habitability of the Torrid Zone', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 44 (1951), 7-10.

⁷¹ Diller (1937), 442-3.

⁷² Chalkokondyles, i. 88.

⁷³ PG 160, 837 B: 'those wools imported from outside the Atlantic Ocean'.

⁷⁴ Diller (1937), 447-8.

⁷⁵ Id. (1956), 33.

On the limits of northern Europe, Gemistos says that there is evidence of the possibility of habitation beyond Thule, but he does not clear up the old mystery about the identification of Thule. It is disputed whether the name originally stood for Iceland, the Shetlands, the Orkneys, the Faeroes, or even Norway. The first was probably the accepted identification in Gemistos' time, if only because Thule seems to have meant Iceland to Columbus half a century later. It is possible that the identification had changed over earlier centuries. Norway is the least probable candidate, even though Thule was not necessarily thought of as an island. Clavus would hardly have been misinformed about Norway, as would have been the case with anyone who took Thule for Norway in Gemistos' account:

Paul (Toscanelli), an admirable man, showed me a map which he said he had obtained from a man from Dateia (Scandinavia), who was not inexperienced in the subject, on which were located Ierne (Ireland) and the other larger island of the British; and Thule, and the peninsula of the Cimbri (Jutland), and the whole coastline of the Germans and the Wends; and east of the Cimbric peninsula, in the gulf of the Wends, the island of Dateia itself, which is about the same size as the larger of the British Isles, separated by a long, narrow strait from the opposite mainland to the north. He indicated that the northern part of this island (Dateia) adjoining the strait is uninhabited, as is also the mainland opposite; but the rest is inhabited. He also indicated that the mainland to the north, which is uninhabited, curves round to the west of this strait well into the polar region and then bends south-west to push out a promontory on the meridian of Ierne and the parallel of Thule.⁷⁶

It has been reasonably suggested that the map shown to Gemistos by Toscanelli was the lost original of a map based on Clavus' geographical treatise, written soon after 1425. There survives a copy of this map, made in Florence some forty years later.⁷⁷ It is clear that Dateia means the whole Scandinavian peninsula, wrongly thought to be an island because no one had yet explored the Arctic Circle. The 'promontory on the meridian of Ierne and the parallel of Thule' is in that case no doubt Greenland. Hence the temptation to think that by introducing Strabo to the western world, and by his discussions with Toscanelli, Gemistos indirectly contributed to the discovery of America.⁷⁸ It is at least certain that Columbus regarded Strabo as a reliable source; and also that he received from Toscanelli a copy of a letter which the latter had written in 1474 to Ferdinand Martens

⁷⁶ Id. (1937), 443-4.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 448, 451 n. (11).

⁷⁸ M. V. Anastos in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th edn., rev. 1971), s.v. Gemistus Pletho.

advising him that the shortest route to eastern Asia lay across the Atlantic rather than round Africa.⁷⁹ Gemistos' contribution to all this fruitful misinformation is hazy and doubtful.

His essay continues with a paragraph on Russia, which is reasonably well informed.⁸⁰ (It was perhaps derived from Isidore, the Metropolitan of Kiev.) Then he turns to Asia. He corrects Strabo's theory that there were no inhabitants to the east of Scythia and India. There were in fact, he says, the Sinae and the Seres (both Chinese), as stated by Ptolemy. Beyond them, according to Ptolemy, are lakes and marshes; and beyond the lakes and marshes nothing has been reported, but there must in fact be an ocean, 'for the western limit of our (Atlantic) Ocean must lie to the east of the Sinae and the Seres'. Since the lakes and marshes can hardly extend across the whole world, where they cease, the inhabited territory outside the limits of the frozen sea must terminate in an ocean and some kind of unknown sea. For either after these marshes or after another land area again, an ocean must follow, with human habitation adjoining it, since it could not be cut off by the marshes in every direction. However, as I say, no report has reached us up to the present of an eastern ocean.⁸¹

Gemistos shows here both his common sense and his ignorance. He was aware that the world is spherical and very large, so that the marshes of China cannot stretch half-way round it. His words could imply the existence of inhabited land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the latter being called the 'eastern ocean' as seen from China. But if he meant to do so, he was merely speculating without any evidence. He had no idea whether such an 'eastern ocean' actually existed, or whether the Atlantic stretched to China. Even his second-hand knowledge of China was less than that of Cosmas Indicopleustes in the sixth century, though he was also free from the latter's absurd fantasies and superstitions about cosmography.

In the limitations of his knowledge of the Far East, though not in his curiosity, Gemistos was typical of the Greeks of his generation. The Italians, who were more adventurous traders, were better informed. Petrarch had known, almost a century earlier, of merchants from Venice crossing Asia 'as far as the distant Seres and the eastern ocean'.⁸² Toscanelli knew much about China from reading Marco Polo. But western experience of the Far East was already contracting

⁷⁹ H. Vignaud, *Toscanelli and Columbus* (London 1902), 294-303.

⁸⁰ Diller (1937), 444, 448-9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 445.

⁸² *Lettere senile*, ed. G. Fracassetti (Florence 1892), III.

in the fifteenth century owing to the domination of Asia by Islam. Even Columbus, half a century later, was not much better informed than the contemporaries of Gemistos. The conventional guides to exploration were still the classical authors, interpreted in the light of common sense. This was true even of the Italians, and much more so of the Greeks.

Africa was also a dark continent to Gemistos. Again his essay relies on common sense rather than first-hand knowledge. He rejects Strabo's notion of an uninhabited 'torrid zone', which had survived for thirteen centuries. His knowledge of the eastern half of Africa extends south of the Equator to a Cape Prasm, which has been identified as Cape Delgado, 11° south of the Equator. But this is quite uncertain, the more so since Strabo places Cape Prasm 'close to Agisymba of the Ethiopians', which must mean north of the Equator. The fact is that Gemistos can add nothing to the speculations of Strabo. He was unaware that Italian travellers had already crossed the Sahara.⁸³

His ignorance of the Portuguese explorations of the eastern Atlantic and the west coast of Africa, which was already in progress, is still more tantalizing. The Portuguese were settling in the Azores in the very year in which Gemistos wrote his essay. They had sent small expeditions down the African coast regularly since 1420. But Gemistos knew nothing of these ventures, and continued to rely on ancient sources rather than contemporary experience for his corrections of Strabo. He therefore accepted, for instance, the Pillars of Hercules (Gibralta and Ceuta) as the limit of the known world to the west, although he was well aware that men had sailed beyond them.⁸⁴

In a brief summary, he recognized the deficiencies of his account. The limits defined 'are not perhaps those of the inhabited world without qualification, but of the world known to us, for we do not yet know whether what lies beyond them is habitable or not'.⁸⁵ His account was also confined to the northern hemisphere, 'for of the southern hemisphere (*ἀντίχθων*), even if it is continuous with the northern, we do not know where the greater part of it is located, apart from a few small areas which have been explored, within the equatorial zone'.⁸⁶ He ended with a tribute to Strabo's general accuracy. As his final sentences remind the reader, what he had set out to do was not to write an up-to-date treatise on geography, but to introduce Strabo for the first time to western scholars. Not long afterwards the

⁸³ Diller (1937), 445, 450.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 445-6.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 445.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 446.

complete work was translated into Latin for the first time by Guarino, who presumably came to know it through Gemistos.⁸⁷

According to some scholars, the introduction of Strabo was Gemistos' most important contribution to the West, because of its impact on Toscanelli and hence of Columbus. But in the history of ideas, first place must be given to his reintroduction of Plato. His *De Differentiis* merits a complete translation, since it is the first work in which a Greek philosopher tried to convey to the Italian humanists the thought of Plato and Aristotle undistorted by Latin or Arabic interpretation. At the same time *De Differentiis* marks a turning-point in his own long life. Scholarios was not mistaken in saying that he had hitherto written no major work of philosophy.

The turning-point was also marked by a significant, and perhaps deliberately symbolic, change of name. *De Differentiis* was issued not as the work of Gemistos but of 'Plethon'. When Scholarios wrote his *Defence of Aristotle* in reply, he usually (though not invariably) referred to the author as Plethon, in spite of knowing that the two names stood for the same man.⁸⁸ On the other hand, he continued to call him Gemistos in other contexts—for instance, when writing to the Despot Demetrios about the circumstances in which the three of them had departed prematurely from Florence.⁸⁹ Bessarion also continued to write to him as Gemistos in 1441, and to his sons as 'sons of Gemistos' in 1452.⁹⁰ Evidently the use of the pseudonym was optional.

Various reasons have been advanced for Gemistos' change of name. It certainly did not succeed in concealing his identity, nor is it likely to have been so intended, for the two names mean much the same thing: 'full' (*Γεμιστός*) and 'abundant' (*Πλήθων*). The name Plethon was naturally thought to be associated with Plato—an association which was made in his life-time. His disciple, Michael Apostoles, addressed him in a letter as 'the second Plato', and in a later polemic against Theodore Gazis he drew attention to the similarity of the names.⁹¹ Other admirers took up the same point. The references to him by

⁸⁷ J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (New York 1958), ii. 50.

⁸⁸ Scholarios, iv. 115-16, uses both names in close proximity. On the last page of a manuscript corrected with his own hand, he twice substituted 'Gemistos' for 'Plethon': p. 116 n.

⁸⁹ Scholarios, iii. 118. 17, 126. 23.

⁹⁰ Mohler, iii. 455, 468.

⁹¹ Alexandre, 370; J. E. Powell, 'Michael Apostolios gegen Theodoros Gaza', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 38 (1938), 83. 11.

Bessarion as second only to Plato,⁹² and the association of his name by Kabakes with Plato and Plotinus,⁹³ have already been quoted.

His enemies assumed that he adopted the pseudonym to encourage these associations. Scholarios referred to him after his death as 'Gemistos, or rather Plethon as he calls himself, extending his devotion to Hellenism, according to many who heard him, to the point of imagining that he was thus honouring not only the style but also his own soul'.⁹⁴ Trapezuntius suggested ironically that he took a name resembling Plato's 'so that we should more readily believe him to have come down from heaven, and thus the sooner adopt his doctrine and law'; Manuel of Corinth (Peloponnesius) wrote that 'he called himself Plethon as if insinuating a link with the soul of Plato'; and Kamariotes thought that his change of name had been inspired by demons.⁹⁵

The Italians followed his admirers rather than his critics in seeking explanations. Ficino, who knew him only at second hand through Cosimo de' Medici, called him 'Plethonem quasi alterum Platonem'.⁹⁶ When Bessarion died, the panegyrics at his funeral naturally referred to his former teacher in similar terms. Bishop Niccolò Capranica (a nephew of Bessarion's old friend, Cardinal Domenico Capranica) described him as 'alterum Platonem'; the humanist Bartolomeo Platina, on the same occasion, spoke of him as 'secundum a Platone'. By a typographical slip, unconsciously illustrating the association, the earliest printed editions of Platina's speech had 'Platonem' substituted for 'Plethonem'.⁹⁷

Later generations continued the association of names. One of his earliest Latin translators, Antimachus, spoke of him as 'Gemistus the philosopher and mathematician, surnamed Plethon, as if it were Plato'.⁹⁸ Almost the same expression was used by George Chariander, an early translator of *De Differentiis*, who wrote that 'he took the surname of Plethon, as if it were Plato, because he came next to Plato, the prince of philosophers'.⁹⁹

It was not unusual to call any outstandingly learned man 'a second Plato', but in the case of Gemistos the compliment was clearly

⁹² Anastos, 186-7 n. 8.

⁹³ Masai (1956), 385-6.

⁹⁴ Scholarios, iv. 160. 27-30.

⁹⁵ Alexandre, p. xix n. 4 (all three quotations). Alexandre mistakenly identified Manuel Peloponnesius as Manuel Holobolus.

⁹⁶ Ficino, ii. 1537.

⁹⁷ Mohler, iii. 406. 35 (Capranica); Alexandre, p. xi n. 1 (Platina). For the confusion 'Platonem' for 'Plethonem', see *Platyne Opera* (Venice 1518), fo. cxiii^v.

⁹⁸ Preface to translation of Gemistos' *De Gestis Graecorum* (Basle 1540).

⁹⁹ PG 160, 887-8.

intended to ring especially true. Nor was there anything unusual about changing one's name. Monks did it as a matter of course, and laymen sometimes acquired secondary names from their professions or their characters. Earlier philosophers had also made such changes. Even Plato himself was not born with that name, according to Diogenes Laertius, but acquired it from the breadth of his shoulders.¹⁰⁰ Porphyry also had a different name at birth.¹⁰¹

At any rate it is under the name of Plethon that the last and most important phase of his life should be recorded. The following chapter contains the complete text of his best-known work, properly entitled 'On the Differences of Aristotle from [or 'with regard to'] Plato', but usually known as *De Differentiis*. The correct title shows that for Plethon the norm was represented by Plato, the deviation by Aristotle. There is consequently rather more about Aristotle than Plato in his essay, in order to emphasize the deviations of the former from the latter. For it was Plethon's contention that the West suffered not only from ignorance of Plato but also from misinterpretation of Aristotle. He did not originally intend to belittle Aristotle, for although he preferred Plato, he regarded both philosophers with great respect. But he was led into a more polemical stance by Scholarios' aggressive retort to *De Differentiis*, entitled in the manuscripts 'In response to the problems of Plethon on Aristotle', and commonly known as the *Defence of Aristotle*.

Thus began the controversy between Platonists and Aristotelians which was to occupy the minds of expatriate Greek scholars in Italy during the next generation. In itself, this was a largely sterile debate. But there also began, in the months at Florence in 1439, something more important to the cultural history of Europe, which was to be a major part of the Greek contribution to the Italian Renaissance.

¹⁰⁰ *Lives of the Philosophers*, iii. 4.

¹⁰¹ *Life of Plotinus*, 17. 7-15.

PART II
PLETHON

XI

DE DIFFERENTIIS

THE first edition of Plethon's essay was published by Bernardus Donatus at Venice in 1540, together with a Latin dialogue of his own composition on the same theme.¹ In an appendix he listed seventeen points covered by his own dialogue, all of which were drawn from *De Differentiis*, but not in the same order. The first Latin translation of *De Differentiis* was made by Nicolaus Tridentinus Scutellius, who died in 1542, but it remains unpublished.² Another translation by George Chariander, using a different manuscript from that of Donatus, was published at Basle in 1574. Donatus' text and Chariander's translation were published in parallel columns (although they do not correspond) by J. P. Migne in *Patrologia Graeca*.

All these are superseded by the text edited by Bernardette Lagarde in 1973, which is based on Plethon's autograph (Marc. gr. 517), found by R. and F. Masai.³ Her text, with a French translation and notes, was submitted as a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris in 1976. The following translation—the first complete version in English—is greatly indebted to her work.

The translation departs from the French edition only in renumbering the paragraphs for easier reference. In Plethon's manuscript they are unnumbered. An unsatisfactory system of numbering was introduced by Chariander and followed by Migne. It divided the essay into twenty sections, of which the twentieth was by far the longest, since it included the whole of Plethon's exposition of the Theory of Forms, amounting to more than one-third of the essay. The French edition makes a more rational division into ten sections, but still treats the Theory of Forms as a single section.

What is most needed is a system of numbering which facilitates reference between three related works: *De Differentiis*, Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle*, and Plethon's *Reply to Scholarios*. I have divided *De Differentiis* for this purpose into fifty-six numbered paragraphs, but

¹ On this paragraph, see Lagarde, 313-14; and for partial corrections of the early editions, see Alexandre, 281-8.

² P. O. Kristeller, *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning* (Durham, North Carolina, 1974), 152.

³ Lagarde, 321-43; Masai (1954), 540-1.

I have included the two earlier sets of numbers in the margin. Thus, PG I, II, III etc. refer to *Patrologia Graeca*, and BL I, II, III etc. to the French edition of Bernardette Lagarde. References to the fifty-six numbered paragraphs are included in the summary of the *Defence of Aristotle* (Ch. XIII). In his *Reply* (Ch. XV), Plethon dealt with thirty-three points raised in the *Defence of Aristotle*. References forward to these points are similarly included in Ch. XIII. It will thus be easy to find what each writer had to say on each point.

On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato

1. Our ancestors, both Hellenes and Romans,⁴ esteemed Plato much more highly than Aristotle. But most people today, especially in the West, who regard themselves as more knowledgeable than their predecessors, admire Aristotle more than Plato. They have been convinced by the claims of the Arab Averroes that Aristotle alone has achieved a complete account of natural philosophy. Now, however seriously Averroes may be taken in other respects, I should nevertheless hesitate to accept readily the view of a man so misguided as to suppose that the soul is mortal; and how could anyone capable of such nonsense be regarded as a competent judge of any serious matter, when even Aristotle himself is evidently not guilty of this particular error?

2. For one must be honest and not misrepresent him, however much he may have misrepresented his predecessors. I regard it as impermissible to retaliate in kind even against those who are themselves guilty of misrepresentation. But since there are still some today who give their preference to Plato, in order to gratify them and to put right their opponents—assuming their motives are not excessively polemical—I will say a few words about the differences between the two men, in order to show how very much inferior the one is to the other, by advancing the briefest possible arguments rather than lengthy and contentious ones.

3. (PG I, BL I). First, then, Plato's view is that God, the supreme sovereign, is the creator of every kind of intelligible and separate substance, and hence of our entire universe.⁵ Aristotle, on the other hand, never calls God the creator of anything whatever, but only the motive force of the universe.⁶ If it is Aristotle's view, although he nowhere says so, that God is the creator, then his exposition of his own philosophy must be defective, in that he ignores God's supreme achievement and extols only a much inferior one. It may be pointed out that Aristotle does make God the end and the final cause;⁷ but even this must be regarded as a not very exalted claim and not one worthy of God, if he

⁴ The normal term for citizens of the eastern as well as the western Empire.

⁵ *Epistles*, ii. 312 E; *Timaeus*, 27 C-30 D.

⁶ *Met.* xii. 1072^b10; *Physics*, viii. 258^b11.

⁷ *Met.* xii. 1072^b3.

makes God the end not of the existence or essence of particular things but only of movement and change.⁸ If, on the other hand, his reason for not calling God anywhere the creator of the universe is simply that he does not believe him to be such, then he would be guilty of an even graver fault, in that he neither states nor even believes the noblest doctrine of all philosophy, which is common not only to philosophy but to all right-thinking mankind.

4. Now, I shall show that he does not even believe in this doctrine. First, it would not be reasonable, if he accepted this noblest doctrine, that he should never refer to it anywhere in his works, when by contrast he goes on at unnecessary length about such things as embryos and shellfish. Secondly, he criticizes those who postulate a cause of the generation of numbers (meaning a cause as distinct from a time when they came into existence, as is clear from his exposition of their arguments); and he argues against them that 'it is absurd, indeed an impossibility, to suppose the generation of eternal entities'.⁹ From this it is clear that Aristotle, like others no doubt, assumes that generation in time must be a necessary consequence of causal generation. On the other hand, Plato, who makes the soul ungenerated in *Phaedrus*¹⁰ (clearly meaning temporally) and generated in *Timaeus*¹¹ (clearly meaning causally) evidently does not hold that generation in time is a necessary consequence of causal generation. But if Aristotle regards our universe as eternal,¹² he clearly could not presuppose its generation; and if not generation, then no creator of it either. So much for that.

5 (PG II). Another absurdity is perpetrated by Aristotle with regard to his God. That is, in assigning the spheres and their movements to the separate minds and substances, he assigns a sphere and the movement of it to God himself, thus placing him on a level with the minds dependent on him.¹³ One can see how absurd this is from the following consideration. Things assigned must be proportionate to those to which they are assigned, if the assignment is to be appropriately made, as Aristotle himself asserts in his writings on justice.¹⁴ So here, the spheres are all of the same substance as each other, for all of them are indestructible bodies, as Aristotle himself says, and both they and their movements are eternal.¹⁵ So those separate minds to which these spheres have been assigned must also be of the same substance as each other, and none of them can be counted different from the others. The most superior of them can excel in degree only to the same extent as the sphere assigned to him excels the other spheres. But such a degree of superiority is insufficient for the dignity of God: anyone can see that, even those of the smallest intelligence, when even the Arab Avicenna recognizes the absurdity of this argument. He himself, more or less following Aristotle, assigns the stars and spheres to

⁸ The Greek *κίνησις* means both 'movement' and 'change'.

⁹ *Met.* xiv. 1091^a12-13. ¹⁰ *Phaedrus*, 246 A. ¹¹ *Timaeus*, 36 E.

¹² *Met.* xii. 1072^a22-3. ¹³ *Ibid.* xii. 1072^a24-6.

¹⁴ *Eth. Nic.* v. 1131^a21-2. ¹⁵ *Met.* xii. 1072^a23; 1073^a30-1.

the other separate minds, but he does not assign a star or any sphere to God: he places God in the highest position over everything else.¹⁶ That is enough, however, on that subject.

6 (PG III, BL II). I turn next to the equivocity (*δμωνυμία*)¹⁷ of being, which Aristotle regards as his own ingenious discovery, something that never occurred to any of his predecessors.¹⁸ Now, he is certainly wrong if he supposes that two beings, one of them having a greater participation in being and the other less, are called beings equivocally;¹⁹ for even if the white in wool is less than that in snow, the white in wool and that in snow are not equivocally so called. Similarly with beings that are prior and posterior to each other,²⁰ or those which are responsible for the rest and those which are not: for in the case of numbers, those which are prior and posterior are not called numbers equivocally but all are numbers in the same sense; and again, in the case of the primary bodies and elements out of which other bodies are constituted, although prior to the bodies constituted from them, none the less both they and the bodies constituted from them are substances, not so called in an equivocal sense. For no one hitherto has made any such assumption.

7. Nor, if something else is conversely predicated of being, such as the predicate 'one', will being cease to be the universal genus, nor be so called only equivocally.²¹ Thus 'capability of laughter' is conversely predicated of man, but that does not make 'man' any the less a universal, predicated of particular men if not as genus at any rate as species, and not in any sense equivocally. If this is so in the case of a species, it must also be so in the case of a genus, for there is an analogy between them, the relation of the genus (*sc.* to the species) being the same as that of the species to what falls under it, except that the ultimate species at least are mostly predicated of indefinitely many instances, whereas genera are predicated in the first place of a finite number of instances.²² To apply this reasoning to a particular genus, if one defines an animal not by its capacity for sensation but by its capacity for imagination, thus distinguishing it from the genus of zoophytes, and then attributes to it the property of every animal, namely mobility, which is perfectly correct, then 'animal' would be a converse predicate of 'mobility' and 'mobility' of 'animal', so that 'animal' would still be the genus of all that falls under the term, and in no way equivocal.

¹⁶ *Avicennae Metaphysices Compendium*, Latin trans. by N. Carame (Rome 1926), i. 4. 1. 1 (pp. 169-71).

¹⁷ The adjective *δμωνυμιος* is translated 'equivocal' or 'homonymous' according to the context.

¹⁸ Equivocity and univocity are defined in *Categories*, i. 1^a1-12. Examples illustrating the equivocity of being are found in *Met.* iv. 1003^b2-5; 1009^a32-6; vi. 1026^a33-7.

¹⁹ *Categories*, viii. 10^b27.

²⁰ *Met.* ii. 999^a6-7.

²¹ Converse predication is defined in *Topics*, i. 102^a18-31. Aristotle argues that genera cannot be conversely predicated of each other: *Anal. Post.* i. 83^b9-11. But he recognizes that 'one' and 'being' can be predicated of each other: *Met.* xi. 1061^a17-18.

²² *Topics*, ii. 109^b14 ff.

8. But, says Aristotle, changing his position,²³ if one were to give not 'reasoning faculty' but 'rationality' as a differentia to an animal—supposing that this were the proper application of differentiae—then 'animal' would not be a predicate of rationality, nor would any other genus of any other such differentia. Such then is not the case with being, for it is impossible to find anything of which 'being' is not to be predicated,²⁴ so being could not be a genus. It is therefore not necessary, in the first place, that what is the case with particular genera should also be the case with the highest genus, since there is no reason why an exception should not occur in the case of the latter which will not occur in the case of other genera. Secondly, what Aristotle says is not true. For if he concocts 'rationality' in order to make that rather than 'reasoning faculty' the differentia of animal, we can retort by concocting 'animality' and make him give us its differentia—and what will he have to offer?²⁵ He cannot make 'reasoning faculty' the differentia of 'animality' and 'rationality' the differentia of 'animal': such perversion of the principles of logic would be intolerable. It is obvious that as 'reasoning faculty' is the differentia of 'animal', so 'rationality', if anything, can only be the differentia of 'animality'. And thus every genus will be predicated of its own differentia, as the rules of logical procedure require. So enough has been said to expose the weakness of Aristotle's arguments seeking to prove the equivocality of being.

9. But we must further show that it is simply impossible for being to be equivocal. For if all things derive from a single absolutely unique source, numerous and indeed innumerable though they be, they must still necessarily have one thing in common between them all. So what else could that be other than being, and that in no equivocal sense? For if it is to be equivocal, then it could not be one. Somewhere Aristotle himself says that 'beings abhor a state of disorder',²⁶ and he quotes: 'The rule of many is not a good thing—let there be one ruler. . . .'²⁷ His words are impressive in theory, but in practice it is he himself who introduces the disorderly state of beings by refusing to allow the unity of being.

10 (PG IV, BL III). A further mark of his ignorance is his making the universal strictly so called inferior to the particular, calling particular things the primary and principal substances and the species and genera secondary substances and inferior to the former.

11. If substance is that which most properly is, as Aristotle himself says,²⁸

²³ Aristotle nowhere 'changes his position' in the precise terms criticized by Plethon. The nearest approximation is in *Met.* viii. 1045^a14-21, where the differentia in question is not 'rationality' but 'two-footedness'. See also n. 25 below.

²⁴ *Topics*, iv. 127^a29-34.

²⁵ 'Rationality' (λογικότης) is not found in Aristotle. It was first used by Alexander of Aphrodisias: *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, i, ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin 1891), 205. 33, 637. 26, commenting respectively on *Met.* iii. 998^b14, xi. 1059^b14. 'Animality' (ζωότης) is first found in Plutarch, *Platonic Questions*, ii. 1001^b.

²⁶ *Met.* xii. 1076^a3-4.

²⁷ Homer, *Iliad*, ii. 204.

²⁸ *Categories*, v. 2^a11-19.

then, if the universal were inferior to the particular in respect of substance, it would have less being. Now, if he were arguing thus not of the universal *qua* universal, he would have reason on his side; for it is possible to take the universal non-universally, taking 'man' as a particular man, not as every man, and 'animal' as a particular animal and not as every animal. But he appears now to be arguing not about the universal in a non-universal sense but about the universal strictly so called, and about genera and species strictly so called. He may perhaps have been misled by the following consideration: that man is in some cases superior to a particular animal, and Socrates to a particular man. But it is not permissible to argue thus in the case of the universal taken universally. For if 'every man' is no different from 'all men', and 'all men' are no different from 'all men taken individually', except only in being understood collectively and severally, then how could it make sense for men individually to be superior substances to 'every man' and possess more being, unless it made sense to take the former term severally and the latter collectively? This might seem reasonable in the judgement of Aristotle himself because he is persistently hostile to the One and enjoys nothing more than to carve up Being.

12. But we would not go along with him. We argue that God does not ordain human nature as a whole for the sake of any individual man but individual men for the sake of human nature as a whole, and human nature itself for the benefit of rational nature as a whole; and in general he created the part for the sake of the whole, as Plato said, and not the whole for the part.²⁹ And we know that the science of the universal is superior to that of the particular, as Aristotle himself argues (no doubt by an oversight) in his work on logic:³⁰ nor could it be superior unless its subject were superior because possessing a greater degree of being. But to Aristotle it is nothing to contradict himself, here and elsewhere. We on the other hand will never admit the universal to be inferior to the particular, so long as the whole is greater than the part rather than the part greater than the whole.

13 (PG V). Aristotle commits a similar fallacy when he says that the universal is analogous to matter, the particular to form.³¹ For the exact contrary must be the case if the universal is a whole and the particular a part. The form is invariably to be found in the whole to a greater degree than in the parts; and the universal exists in actuality³² to a greater degree than the particular. For the universal, regarded as universally in things in themselves, both exists in actuality itself and comprises in actuality all the particulars; whereas the particular, although it exists in actuality itself, does not contain the universal in

²⁹ *Laws*, x. 903 c.

³⁰ *Anal. Post.* i. 86^a3-4.

³¹ *Met.* v. 1024^b8-10; *De Part. Animal.* i. 643^a24. But Aristotle nowhere uses the precise phrase quoted, as is pointed out by Scholarios, iv. 68. 18-27.

³² The word *ἐνέργεια* (which Plethon uses for the classical *ἐνέργεια*) is translated as 'actuality', 'activity', or 'action' according to context.

itself in a universal sense, but only so much of the universal as properly belongs to it. In fact, the universal is complete, the particular incomplete.

14 (PG VI). Again, he must be wrong in arguing that the sensible object can exist prior in time to the act of sensation,³³ since that contradicts the well-established general proposition that relatives and correlatives must necessarily exist simultaneously. For to take the case of an act of sensation which will never occur, how could there be a sensible object of a sensation which does not exist and is never going to exist? If, on the other hand, there is to be a future act of sensation, it will clearly come about from a state of possibility, so that the sensible object will itself be potentially sensible and related to a potential sensation, and the potential sensation will be related to a potentially sensible object, neither of them existing in actuality prior to the other nor until both actually exist. It follows that a sensible object could not come into existence prior to an act of sensation.

15 (PG VII). Another general, well-established principle which he contradicts is the axiom that contradictories cannot both be true. He argues that an indefinite contradictory can be simultaneously true (*sc.* with its opposite), but here he is obviously wrong.³⁴ For an indefinite negation is not equivalent to a definite particular negation but to a universal negation, as being the negation of a particular affirmative proposition. And this is how everybody commonly uses terms.³⁵

16 (PG VIII). Another case is the axiom that the conclusion always follows the weaker premise; and by 'weaker' is meant the particular as against the universal, the negative as against the affirmative, the assertoric as against the apodeictic, and the problematic as against the assertoric. But Aristotle says that an apodeictic conclusion can be drawn from a combination of an apodeictic and an assertoric premise.³⁶ If, however, it is the middle term which connects the major to the minor, it could not form this connection except in so far as it contains the major and itself appertains to the minor. So if it contains the major necessarily and appertains necessarily to the minor, then and only then would an apodeictic conclusion follow; but if it is not necessarily related to either, then it could not necessarily connect the major to the minor. Such is the sort of thing that Aristotle asserts.

17 (PG IX, BL IV). Next let us go on to the errors in his theory of the soul. The Platonists make the superessential One absolutely one, making no distinction between its essence, potentiality, and actuality.³⁷ But they do not assert that the Forms, which are secondary to the One, and the Minds are equally simple. They distinguish their actuality from their essence; but they

³³ *Categories*, vii. 7^b36.

³⁴ *De Interpret.* vii. 17^b30-4.

³⁵ This paragraph puzzled the Emperor John VIII, who wrote to Plethon asking for an explanation. For his letter and Plethon's reply, see L. G. Benakis, "Πλήθωνος πρὸς ἠρωτημένα ἄττα ἀποκρίσις", *Φιλοσοφία*, 4 (1974), 348-59; and pp. 229-30 below.

³⁶ *Anal. Prior.* i. 30^a15-19.

³⁷ *Republic*, vi. 509 B; Plotinus, *Enneads*, v. 5. 6.

do not at all distinguish their potentiality from their actuality because, being changeless, they possess all their attributes permanently in the present, not potentially but actually. In the soul, however, they distinguish essence and potentiality and actuality, because the soul moves from one thought to another, and the human soul from thinking to not-thinking and from not-thinking to thinking, and so does not always possess knowledge of things nor possess it entirely in actuality but rather potentially. Aristotle, however, describes the soul as 'changeless';³⁸ and if he has in mind change from place to place, he is right; but if he means quite simply all change, which he does not make at all clear, then he is wrong. For how could the soul, plainly always shifting—from one thought to another, or from thinking to not-thinking or the reverse, as Aristotle himself recognizes to be the case at least with the human mind—be changeless?³⁹ Let us leave this point, however, and return to the earlier one.

18. The Platonists make these distinctions, but Aristotle makes no such distinction, simply declaring that every mind is essentially an actuality.⁴⁰ How then can he account for the human mind, if its essence and actuality are identical, when it is neither thinking nor acting—will it not lose its essence along with its activity, and so perish? And will it return to life when it starts thinking again? Plainly Aristotle was being very careless when he said this.

19 (PG X). Consider now the fallacies and inconsistencies in the following argument. As can be seen from his treatise *De Generatione Animalium*, Aristotle concedes that the human mind is prior in time to its present body,⁴¹ yet he goes on to criticize those who call learning 'recollection'. Now if the mind existed at all prior to its present body, must it not then have had knowledge and thought? What could prevent it? And if it knew and thought and suffered oblivion in its descent to its present body, and then recovered again what it once knew, is not that recollection?

20 (PG XI). There is a further point on which Aristotle is open to criticism. He makes the human mind indestructible and eternal, as is evident from his treatise *De Anima* and also from that on *Metaphysics*;⁴² yet in his treatises on *Ethics* he makes no application of this argument, although it is a major contribution to moral theory and to discussions of virtue. And what is worse, he assumes that nothing whatever that is good lies in store for man after the end of his present life.⁴³ Such is Aristotle's capacity for consistency with his own words! For if man leaves behind him anything immortal, that would clearly in effect be the man in the strictest sense. How then could there be nothing good

³⁸ *De Anima*, i. 406^a2-3, criticizing *Timaeus*, 34 A.

³⁹ *Ibid.* iii. 429^a23 ff. The words 'be changeless' are supplied.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* iii. 430^a17-18. The Greek comprises both 'actuality' and 'activity'.

⁴¹ *De Gen. Animal.* ii. 736^a32-6. The Platonic theory of 'recollection' is expounded in *Meno*, 81 A ff. and *Phaedo*, 72 E ff.

⁴² *De Anima*, i. 408^b19-20; *Met.* xii. 1070^a26-7.

⁴³ *Eth. Nic.* iii. 1115^a26-7.

in store for him on departing from this life? Surely the contrary would occur: he would enjoy a far happier state once he was released from his present mortal state. And that is why Alexander of Aphrodisias, starting from these premises and carrying the argument to his own deplorable conclusion, made Aristotle as well take the view that even the human soul is mortal.⁴⁴ So much for that subject.

21 (PG XII, BL V). Now I want to say a few words about his discussion of the virtues, and to show here again how far from convincing his argument is. He defines the virtues as means and the vices as extremes: that is to say, means and again extremes in affections of the soul.⁴⁵ But what he understands by the mean of virtue—which could be defined in a number of different ways, either qualitatively or quantitatively—he simply fails to make clear; though it can be inferred from a single brief passage, in which feeling no fear of thunderstorms and earthquakes is classified as vice.⁴⁶ From this it appears that he distinguishes what is tolerable and what is intolerable not qualitatively but in terms of greater and less degree, in other words wholly quantitatively. This is not the view of the Platonists, nor of all other right-thinking people, who hold that everything immoral, whether great or small, is intolerable and everything not immoral is tolerable, thus making the distinction of the tolerable and the intolerable qualitative rather than quantitative. Why after all should earthquakes and thunderstorms deserve to inspire fear, when they are not morally bad and do nothing to make a man worse? In general, it is senseless to stand in fear of thunderstorms, not only because there is nothing immoral about being struck by lightning and thus being released from this mortal state (since it is none of our doing, and therefore not to be regarded as either moral or immoral on our part), but also for two other reasons. In the first place, it is one of those things which happen so rarely that it is utterly absurd to live in fear and expectation of such things; and secondly, there is no way we can escape them even if we are afraid of them. A man who is afraid of winter can protect himself against it, and so can a man against a wild beast; but how can a man who is afraid of a thunderstorm protect himself? A man who is afraid of a thunderstorm would therefore be experiencing a totally pointless fear.

22. One can even go further: if the highest virtue lies in the mean position between two different affections of the soul, and if the best type of man experiences both of two opposite affections—confidence and fear, desire and contempt—defining these affections in terms of the moral and immoral, the good and bad, it will follow that the converse type of man, who is wholly wicked, can himself equally occupy a mean position. While Aristotle makes vice consist only in extremes, a man who desires everything, whether

⁴⁴ Alexander of Aphrodisias, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, Supp. 2. i, ed. I. Bruns (Berlin 1887), 21. 22-4.

⁴⁵ *Eth. Nic.* ii. 1107^a1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* iii. 1115^b27 (slightly misquoted).

permissible or impermissible, would presumably be no more wicked in desiring what is permissible than the man who abjures everything is in abjuring what he ought: each of them would be in a sense half-wicked. The wholly wicked man, who is the exact opposite of the best type of man, would be a man who abjures what he should desire and desires what he should abjure. He would thus be subject to both the opposing affections, though wrongly affected by them, and he would therefore occupy a mean position while being the exact opposite of the best type of man. So much for that subject.

23 (PG XIII). What Aristotle says on the final end is also open to the criticism that he does not, like all right-thinking people, make moral beauty (*τὸ καλόν*) the Good, but pleasure; adding of course that he means contemplative pleasure.⁴⁷ But supposing that contemplative pleasure is the Good, then, if it is the Good *qua* contemplative, it follows that pure contemplation would be the Good, whether pleasure ensues or not; and if contemplation *qua* pleasant is the Good, then again pure pleasure would be the Good, whether we experience it in contemplation or in any other circumstances. But it is impossible for contemplative pleasure to be the Good both *qua* contemplative and *qua* pleasure, unless there is a single further factor common to both; for the Good which comes to us from that one superessential Good, through which we are to enjoy all the other goods which participate in it, must itself be one. Now, we say that this is moral beauty, through participating in which contemplation is good, and similarly pleasure and anything else whatsoever.

24. Presumably the reason why Aristotle attached the word 'contemplative' to pleasure was to make it clear that our own particular pleasure is our Good, since contemplation is our own special function;⁴⁸ for the Good must not only be good but must also be directly related to ourselves if it is to be something we ourselves will choose. Here he is saying something not very different from Epicurus, who makes the pleasure of the soul the Good;⁴⁹ for Epicurus seems to have taken the starting-point in his discussion of pleasure from Aristotle here. We, on the contrary, will offer a brief demonstration to show that pleasure is not the Good. For we recognize that we enjoy this contemplative pleasure most intensely when contemplating something that we recall to mind from oblivion, and not at all when we have had it constantly in mind for a long time. Now, if pleasure is the Good, then whatever is more pleasant is better than, and preferable to, what is less pleasant; so to contemplate what has been recalled from oblivion ought to be better than, and preferable to, being in a constant state of awareness. Yet no one in his senses would choose the former rather than the latter.

25. With regard to Aristotle's mistaken reasoning in the treatise on *Ethics*,

⁴⁷ *Eth. Nic.* x. 1177^a12-18 (speaking of *εὐδαιμονία* rather than *ἡδονή*). In x. 1172^b9 ff., Aristotle agrees with Plato that *ἡδονή* is not the supreme Good.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* x. 1177^a18-20.

⁴⁹ Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, x. 129.

one could add a great deal more on many points, but that is sufficient. For our purpose is not simply to correct Aristotle on every particular point, but to refer only to the most important and fundamental points, and those on which his differences from Plato are most serious and his inferiority to Plato most marked.

26 (PG XIV, BL VI). Next a word must be said about Aristotle's innovative theories with regard to the universe and the fifth element. All earlier philosophers, including the Platonists, name four principal elements in our universe: fire, air, water, earth. Of these, they say that fire and earth are at opposite extremes to each other: fire being the lightest owing to its tenuous texture, and therefore rising to the top; earth being the heaviest owing to its density, and therefore resting at the bottom; air and water being placed between them because their tenuity and density are intermediate relatively to them. So too with regard to change, in the sense of movement, and in regard to rest, again fire and earth are at opposite extremes, air and water intermediate between them: thus, if earth be motionless, fire would be in perpetual motion; and again, if earth be motionless and water mobile, but much less in motion than air, and if air far exceeds water in mobility and fire exceeds air in mobility to an even greater degree, then fire would be in perpetual motion. And if it is in perpetual motion, then it must move in a circle, for nothing that moves in a straight line can be in perpetual motion, since what moves in a straight line must sooner or later come to rest. So the aether and all that supernal body which is properly called heaven must be made of that element.

27. What is it that Aristotle had against this reasoning which led him to invent his fifth element? He says that fire can be seen to move in a straight line and the heavens in a circle, so they cannot be made of the same element as fire.⁵⁰ But earth too can sometimes be seen to move, and its movement is in a straight line; but this happens only whenever it is in the wrong place. Once it reaches its proper place, it stays there and moves no more, such being its more natural condition. So why should not fire, whenever it is in the wrong place, also be seen to move in a straight line, taking a form of motion common to all bodies when they are in the wrong place, in order to arrive as quickly as possible where it belongs; and then, when it is in its proper place, start moving in a circle, this being its more natural condition? As for Aristotle's fifth element, if a particle of it were to be found in its wrong place, would it stay there and move in a circle, or would it move in a straight line until it found its proper place?

28. Aristotle argues, however, that as the four known elements are liable to partial dissolution and none of them is wholly indestructible, there has to be an entirely indestructible element, and this constitutes the heavens.⁵¹ This

⁵⁰ *De Caelo*, i. 269^b12-13; ii. 287^a29; ii. 289^a34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* i. 270^a13-15; *De Mundo*, ii. 392^a6-9. Plethon would not have been aware that *De Mundo* is spurious.

again the Platonists do not concede to him, since they say that there exists no intrinsically indestructible element. For they ask how anything could be intrinsically indestructible which can be divided and dissipated, or all that is, by its nature, liable to dissolution. They argue that material bodies which are judged, even by themselves, to be indestructible, are not intrinsically indestructible but owe their immortality solely to the presence in them of soul.⁵² Such is the view of the Platonists; and since Aristotle himself agrees that such bodies are possessed of soul,⁵³ he ought rightly to attribute this privilege to the soul rather than invent an intrinsically indestructible element.

29 (PG XV). Again it is ridiculous for him to make the stars animate, for he says somewhere that 'we think of them as living beings';⁵⁴ yet he also later supposes that they are motionless in themselves, being made to revolve only by various spheres.⁵⁵ What kind of soul will he suppose them to possess if they are to remain perpetually stationary: not surely like some kind of shellfish?

30 (PG XVI). Since Aristotle holds that the sun gives out heat not by reason of its natural temperature but by its motion,⁵⁶ why does not the moon similarly give out heat by its motion? For even if the motion of the moon is much slower than that of the sun, still it is also much nearer to us. It is a fact of nature that bodies which have the power to cause an effect cause it more effectively from close up. Consequently one would expect the moon to compensate for its slower motion by its closer proximity to us, and so to give out as much heat as the sun, if motion rather than natural heat were the cause of its giving out heat. But I have shown that his novel theory regarding the so-called 'fifth element' is futile.

31 (PG XVII, BL VII). Again, I cannot ignore the wholly misconceived argument in his lectures on *Physics*. He says it is absurd to think that what happens is purposeless unless one can see the agent of it exercising deliberation. On the contrary, says Aristotle, art exercises no deliberation; for if the art were inherent in a piece of wood, it would not be deliberating.⁵⁷ But how could an art continue to be so called if there were no deliberation prior to its exercise? What is the essential constituent of an art other than deliberation? If that were taken away, no art would remain. How could anything be carried through to an end of any kind without a mind exercising prior deliberation, and indeed preconceiving that end within itself? For if art imitates nature, as Aristotle himself holds,⁵⁸ then nature cannot be inferior to art: on the contrary, nature must long beforehand possess that which constitutes art in an even higher degree. And even though there is clearly an element in art which does not deliberate, such as an instrument or a labourer, it is not in them that the art

⁵² *Phaedo*, 78 B ff.; *Timaeus*, 32 C ff.

⁵³ *De Caelo*, ii. 285^a29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* ii. 292^a19-22. In fact Aristotle says that we think of the stars as lifeless, but we ought to think of them as living beings.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* ii. 289^b30-3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* ii. 289^a32; *Meteor.* i. 341^a19-20.

⁵⁷ *Physics*, ii. 199^b26-30. See also Masai (1956), 190.

⁵⁸ *Physics*, ii. 194^a21-2; ii. 199^a15-17.

lies but in the master-craftsman. Similarly, if one observes something irrational in nature, then the nature which effectively produces the result does not lie therein; for nature is instituted by God, and God's institution cannot be irrational.

32. Of Aristotle's predecessors, it seems to me that it is Anaxagoras whom he mainly admires, to go by his writings. For Anaxagoras began by making mind preside over all things, but went on to pursue his argument without reference to mind, inclining rather to atheism.⁵⁹ Similarly Aristotle makes various gods preside over our universe, and yet in most of his writings he seems to make no mention of the divine, but rather inclines as near as he can to atheism. This is not the case with Plato, either in the context we are now discussing or anywhere else. On the contrary, he distinguishes the two arts of god and man, both of which require mind. To the human art he attributes every artefact, to the divine art everything that occurs naturally.⁶⁰ In Pindar's felicitous phrase, God may be described as the supreme artist.⁶¹

33 (PG XVIII, BL VIII) I pass on to the most serious of all Aristotle's fallacies, which is to be found in his treatise on *Metaphysics*.⁶² The question is whether everything that comes to be does so necessarily, or some occurrences do not do so necessarily. Those who suppose that everything occurs necessarily try to prove it from two axioms. One is that whatever occurs must necessarily do so from some cause; the other is that every cause must produce whatever effect it may have in both a necessary and a determinate way. Aristotle recognizes that from these two assumptions the conclusion must follow that every event occurs necessarily. But in order to avoid conceding this point, he takes as certain the second part of the antithesis, while asserting that some things which occur do not do so necessarily.⁶³ Therefore he contradicts the first axiom, but he does not reject the proposition that every cause must produce whatever effect it may have in both a necessary and a determinate way; for he has previously made extensive use of this proposition in his writings on eternal motion,⁶⁴ so he could not reject it without manifestly contradicting himself. He attacks, then, the remaining axiom and asserts that some things come to be even without cause, thus rejecting an axiom which is taken to be uniquely certain by everybody else, whether philosophers or laymen, except apparently Aristotle himself.

34. Yet Aristotle himself asserts that 'everything which moves is moved by something'.⁶⁵ But I should have thought that this latter proposition was

⁵⁹ Anaxagoras, fr. 12, in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels (Berlin 1922), i. 404. 16-17; revised edn., W. Kranz (Dublin and Zürich 1972), ii. 38. 5.

⁶⁰ *Sophist*, 265 B ff.; *Laws*, x. 889 A ff.

⁶¹ *Paeon*, xii. fr. 48, ed. C. M. Bowra (Oxford 1935) = Pindar, fr. 57, ed. B. Snell, rev. H. Machler (Leipzig 1975).

⁶² *Met.* vii. 1032^a12-13.

⁶³ *De Gen. et Corr.* ii. 336^a27-9; *De Interpret.* ix. 19^a18-19.

⁶⁴ *Met.* xii. 1073^a3-13; *Physics*, viii. 261^b27 ff.; *De Caelo*, ii. 287^a23-4.

⁶⁵ *Met.* xii. 1073^a26; *Physics*, viii. 256^a13-14.

validated by the prior one, rather than being self-evident. I would argue that since everything which moves is, in respect of its movement, in a state of becoming (for each movement in that which moves is a kind of becoming), and since everything which occurs does so from some cause, therefore everything which moves must be moved by some cause. Aristotle rejects the first axiom but still thinks he can take the other for granted, failing to observe that by rejecting the former axiom he is weakening belief in the deity. For it is clear that in accepting this axiom, men are adopting the first and readiest of all beliefs in the deity. For since it is manifest that certain things which occur in our universe have no visible cause, men who assume that everything which occurs does so from some cause then refer such things to belief in the deity. And Aristotle ought to have indicated what it is that occurs without cause, instead of simply asserting it as a fact. It may perhaps be suggested that deliberation is such an occurrence, as Aristotle himself suggests in his treatise *De Interpretatione*, where he says it can be seen that the origin of what is to be lies both in deliberation and in action.⁶⁶ But here too he is plainly mistaken, for deliberation is not the origin of that which is to be: it may sometimes be a cause, but certainly not the origin in the sense he intends,⁶⁷ since there are evidently prior causes lying in the circumstances around us. For it is clear that but for such circumstances around us giving us the idea of what there is to deliberate about, we should not deliberate. So much for Aristotle's theory.

35. But we must further show that in rejecting this axiom Aristotle is actually contradicting himself. He supposes that there can be no transition from potentiality to act without the impulse being given to it by a prior act.⁶⁸ Using this axiom in his writings on eternal motion, together with the other axiom that every cause must produce its effect necessarily, he arrives at his conclusion on eternal motion.⁶⁹ So, whenever any event occurs, there will be a transition from potentiality to act, which could not take place without another prior act bringing about the transition; and this must be the cause of its occurrence, so it follows that nothing could occur without a cause. Thus it is clear that Aristotle has accumulated a mass of errors in his treatise on *Metaphysics*, and of all the statements in it this is the most fallacious.

36 (PG XIX, BL IX). Another absurdity is to be found in the *Physics*, where he fails to recognize that movement has a dual and equivocal meaning: an active sense in the case of the mover and a passive sense in the case of the moved.⁷⁰ Since there are two potentialities in relation to movement—an active one in that which is to cause the movement and a passive one in that which is to be moved—there would have to be an appropriate action assigned to each of these potentialities: an active movement to the motive potentiality and a passive one to the potentiality of being moved. But Aristotle was afraid to admit that this active movement will sometimes, despite being a movement, itself be

⁶⁶ *De Interpret.* ix. 19^a7-9.

⁶⁷ *Met.* v. 1013^a14-19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* ix. 1049^b24-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* xii. 1071^b7-12; xii. 1073^a23-5.

⁷⁰ *Physics*, iii. 202^a21 ff.

motionless.⁷¹ His fear was in fact groundless, for what is to prevent this active movement, although a cause of movement, from being not in motion itself, the cause of movement being in some cases motionless? This could not occur with the passive sense of movement, but why should it not with the active sense? In these examples we have demonstrated the errors of Aristotle—not indeed all of them, but singling out the major and most crucial ones—in his differences from Plato and the Platonists.

37 (PG XX, BL X). There remains one of the most important subjects of all to discuss, which is the Theory of Forms. Without following Plato on this subject, we may be permitted to point out nevertheless that Aristotle's refutation of it is fallacious, in some respects misrepresenting the theory and in others proving nothing, since we have already indicated at various points in the preceding discussion, while not following Plato, that Aristotle sometimes contradicts himself. In the first place, then, he must be shown to be mistaken in saying that the followers of Socrates—obviously meaning Plato—were the first to originate the Theory of Forms.⁷² It is evident in fact that even before Plato the Pythagoreans adopted this doctrine, as can be inferred from the work of Timaeus of Locri, who presents our universe as an image of an intelligible model of the ideal world.⁷³ So much for that. Further, while the proponents of the Forms regard them not as synonymous (identical) with objects of sense but merely as homonymous (analogous) with them, is it not wrong of Aristotle to distort the theory by arguing that they are synonymous?⁷⁴ For he denies that the fact that the Forms are eternal, and the objects of sense perishable, means that they cannot be synonymous, pointing out that the white which is durable and the white which is ephemeral are still none the less synonymous.⁷⁵ Agreed, Aristotle, if it were arguable that, since the durable white, whose existence is none the less limited and therefore comparable with the other, is synonymous with an ephemeral white, therefore so also will the perishable be synonymous with what is imperishable and in no way comparable.

38. And how, one may ask him, did you arrive at this conclusion? What prompted you to draw a parallel between things which are comparable and things which are incomparable, and hence to assume that what occurs in the case of comparable things occurs also in the case of the incomparable? To anyone who heard you laying down the precise rules of demonstration in your work on that subject,⁷⁶ it would never occur that you could bring yourself to put forward such inept and fallacious arguments on the subject.

⁷¹ *Met.* iii. 996^a22-3.

⁷² *Ibid.* i. 987^b1-14, where Plato is in fact named.

⁷³ Timaeus Locrus, *De Natura Mundi et Animae*, ed. W. Marg (Leiden 1972), 215. 5 (97 D). Plethon was unaware that the work attributed to Timaeus (Socrates' interlocutor in Plato's dialogue named after him) was in fact a later fabrication.

⁷⁴ *Timaeus*, 52 A; *Met.* i. 987^b10.

⁷⁵ *Eth. Nic.* i. 1096^b4-5 (slightly misquoted).

⁷⁶ The reference is probably to the *Posterior Analytics*.

39. We know indeed that the proponents of the Forms suppose their existence to be only homonymously related to objects of sense, and they so describe them.⁷⁷ Nevertheless we shall also show, from their own premises, that no other supposition is possible. For the intelligible entities are assumed to be models of the sensible images; and the image could not be supposed to be synonymous with the model, unless one were to suppose Lysander's statue to be synonymous with Lysander or Herakles' statue with Herakles. Aristotle says, however, that 'it follows from the principles of knowledge that there must be Forms of each and all of the objects of knowledge; and it follows from the principle of the "one over many" that there must also be Forms of negatives; and it follows from the possibility of thinking of something which has perished that there must be Forms of perishable things'.⁷⁸ Aristotle's words are not altogether clear, and our first task must be to explain what the proponents of the Forms actually say, and then to clarify Aristotle's meaning.

40. The proponents of the Forms say that the soul, by acquiring knowledge of the rational principles inherent in objects of sense, has them within itself in a more accurate and perfect condition than they have in the objects of sense.⁷⁹ The soul, then, could not have this greater perfection and accuracy from the objects of sense, since it is not in them. Nor again can the soul of itself conceive it when it nowhere exists, because it is not in the nature of the soul to conceive anything non-existent. For false beliefs are not combinations of non-existent things but combinations of things which exist but are incompatible, being incorrectly formed.⁸⁰ So it can only be supposed that this more perfect quality of the rational principles in objects of sense reaches the soul from some other natural source, itself greatly superior and more perfect.

41. To this Aristotle replies that if the existence of the Forms follows from the premise that the rational principles of knowledge are more perfect than their embodiment in sensible things, then there will be as many Forms as there are objects of knowledge; and it also follows from the possibility of thinking of something which has perished that, if it is impossible for the soul to think of something non-existent, then there will also be a particular Form of everything which is perishable.⁸¹ Again, what Aristotle means by the 'one over many' principle implying Forms of negatives is as follows. The proponents of the Forms say that, where many things have one and the same attribute, it is impossible for that same attribute to occur in all of them spontaneously; for things cannot be just so regulated spontaneously, whether invariably or even as a general rule. So wherever a number of things have one and the same attribute, if it is intrinsic and not purely accidental, there would have to be a single transcendent factor to provide each and every one of them with that attribute. Against this Aristotle introduces the argument that the 'one over many'

⁷⁷ *Timaeus*, 29 C.

⁷⁸ *Met.* i. 990^b12-15.

⁷⁹ Proclus, *In Parmenidem* (*Opera Inedita*, ed. V. Cousin, Paris 1864), 789, 14-16.

⁸⁰ *Theaetetus*, 193 C-D; *Sophist*, 263 A-D.

⁸¹ *Met.* i. 990^b14-15.

principle implies Forms of negatives. That is to say that, if the fact that a number of human beings share the single attribute of humanity entails that there has to be a single transcendent factor to provide them with this attribute of humanity, then there would also have to be a single factor for non-human beings to provide them with their non-humanity; for there are many such beings which have the single attribute of non-humanity just as human beings have that of humanity. Such then is Aristotle's argument.

42. What is required of us, then, is first to explain the nature and character of the Forms as postulated by their proponents, and thus to reply to Aristotle's arguments; for this would be the clearest way of showing that his arguments are in some cases misrepresentations and in other cases prove nothing. The proponents of the Forms do not suppose that God in his absolute perfection is the immediate creator of our universe but rather of another prior nature and substance, more akin to himself, eternal and incapable of change in perpetuity; and that he created the universe not directly by himself but through that substance. Of that substance is composed, they say, an intelligible order which Timaeus of Locri calls Ideal, meaning Formal. And they make an assemblage of all these Forms of all kinds and their Minds, and place a single perfect Mind over the whole of the intelligible order, assigning to it the second place in the sovereignty of the universe after God in his absolute perfection. This Mind, they say, has used as its model the intrinsically intelligible order in creating our universe and sensible order; and this sensible order is the image of the intelligible order, both as a whole and in its parts, deriving nothing that requires a cause except from that order.

43. Now, everything which exists or comes into being requires a cause;⁸² but privations and miscarriages and whatever falls away into non-being require no cause: such things are due rather to the absence of a cause. The same is true of negatives, which arise only from the absence of any cause for the contrary affirmatives. Nor do accidental occurrences in our world have a single cause in the other; for such things occur in our world from the conjunction of a number of causes, each of which can be referred to the other world, so that they are due to no single cause in the other world. Nor do infinite things each have a single cause in the other world: there is only one Form there which is a cause of all the things which fall away into infinity in this world; for things there are entirely dissociated from infinity in a quantitative sense. But the superessential God is wholly dissociated from multiplicity, being himself absolute unity. In the intelligible, intermediate world there is multiplicity, but it is finite and certainly not infinite, either potentially or actually. In our sensible order, however, infinity occurs quite understandably, through matter to which in the first place the infinite attaches; and this matter has its cause in the other world, but the cause there is not itself infinite. Nor is there an irrational Form in the other world of what is irrational here, nor a mobile Form of what moves. On

⁸² *Timaeus*, 28 A.

the other hand, the substances in this world, and all their inherent attributes and relations, have their Forms and models in the other world: relations are included because even in the other world things must be related to each other, so that relations in this world must be images of relations in the other; and the same with attributes, since things in the other world cannot be without attributes.⁸³ In the superessential One, because it is absolutely one, neither essence nor attribute nor actuality nor potentiality is to be distinguished. In the Forms and their Minds, which are not on a level with the One, attributes are distinguished from essence but not potentiality from actuality.⁸⁴ The latter distinction, however, is applicable to things in this world, as well as the first, so that things in the other world occupy something like an intermediate position between the superessential One and the objects of sense in this world. So we have explained as briefly as possible, in broad outline, the nature and character of the Forms as postulated by their proponents.

44. Now we must answer the arguments of Aristotle. He says it follows from the rational principles of knowledge that there will have to be as many Forms as there are objects of knowledge. As the objects of knowledge are in every case things that exist in themselves, whether self-sufficient entities and substances or attributes inherent *per se* in such things, the proponents of the Forms will readily agree that there are Forms of all these things, though not in the same way in all cases: in the case of things in this world which are divided into determinate species, there is one Form corresponding to each species; but in the case of those which fall away into infinity, there is one Form corresponding to the whole infinite number of them. Thus they postulate one Form in the other world corresponding to every number in this world up to infinity—a single Form comprising in its unity all separate, individual instances of number in this world. In the same way they postulate a single indivisible Form of magnitude in the other world which corresponds to all the instances of magnitude in this world.⁸⁵ And from these Forms the soul derives its enlightenment and apprehends the full extent of mathematical number and mathematical magnitudes, which are the shadows and reflections of intelligible things according to Plato, who establishes an analogy between them and the intelligible reality similar to that between reflections in water or the shadows of objects of sense in this world to the objects of sense themselves.⁸⁶ And they say that man-made artefacts here are comprehended in the single Form of man in the other world, from which different craftsmen mentally apprehend

⁸³ *Phaedo*, 75 A.

⁸⁴ This sentence derives from Neoplatonism rather than from Plato's own theory. For the relation of Forms, Minds, and the One, see Plotinus, *Enneads*, v. 9. *passim*.

⁸⁵ *Phaedo*, 65 D, and *Parmenides*, 130 E ff., presuppose a Form of magnitude; but Plato does not postulate a Form of number. Aristotle recognized this in *Eth. Nic.* i. 1096^a18-19, but he asserted in *Met.* i. 991^b9 that in the final version of Plato's Theory of Forms, the Forms *are* numbers.

⁸⁶ *Republic*, vi. 510 A ff.; vii. 516 A-B.

different instances; and having given shape in their own minds to the forms of each of the articles which they first apprehend, they then put them in hand in objects of sense.⁸⁷ As for the question whether accidental occurrences can be objects of knowledge, the answer is that such things arise from the conjunction of multiple causes, each of which can be referred to the other world, and from thence the soul can derive enlightenment and so acquire knowledge about them too. This is what the Platonists would say in reply to the argument from the principles of knowledge.

45. To the argument about the 'one over many' principle implying Forms of negatives, they would reply that this by no means necessarily follows: for the Form of man in the other world is, for those to whom it attaches itself, the cause of their being humans; and for those to whom it does not attach itself, they remain non-humans. To the argument about Forms of perishable things, from the possibility of thinking about something that has perished, they would say that a single Form in the other world is sufficient, comprising all the perishable things included in the same concept. Just as it can give rise to any previously non-existent thing, so it can renew the image of anything that has perished in the souls of those who continue to think about it. So these are the replies which the proponents of the Forms would give to Aristotle's arguments; and they would be wholly consistent with their own hypotheses.

46. Let us go on to the following points which merit discussion. Aristotle says that the Platonic theory implies that 'it is not the dyad which is primary but number'.⁸⁸ The Platonists would reply that there is no reason why number in the other world should not be both simple and prior to the dyad, while in this world the dyad precedes number *in extenso*. Further, Aristotle says that if there is no participation of accidents in the Forms, there would be Forms only of substances.⁸⁹ But the Platonists would reply thus: your argument might perhaps hold good if all things were either substances or accidental attributes of substances; but since there are some things which are attributes of substances *per se*, your argument has no force. Even in the case of accidents, while each is not related *per se* to its effect, nevertheless it is not totally distinct from those things which occur *per se*. For since every such accidental thing occurs from the conjunction of multiple causes, each of which has whatever effect it has *per se*, the results of such causes would not be wholly distinct from that which occurs *per se*, nor would there be a total lack of affinity between that which occurs accidentally and that which occurs *per se*; rather there would be a link between the former and the latter. For example, when there was an eclipse of the sun during the celebration of the Olympic Games, that is not to say that there was an eclipse of the sun because the games were being celebrated, nor that the games were being celebrated because there was an eclipse of the sun, which would mean that the eclipse of the sun at the time of the Olympic

⁸⁷ Ibid. x. 596 A-B; *Cratylus*, 389 A-C.

⁸⁸ *Met.* i. 990^b19-21.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 990^b28-31.

Games did not occur *per se*. For the causes of the eclipse of the sun were responsible *per se* for the eclipse, and the law regulating the Olympic Games was responsible *per se* for their being held. It follows that the cause of the coincidence of the Olympic Games and the eclipse of the sun was a certain correspondence in their relative periodicities, and this correspondence was due to another cause or other causes, each of which would be responsible *per se* for its appropriate effect. So they would say as follows to Aristotle: you must not try to force us to accept that everything must be either a substance or an accidental attribute of a substance, by divorcing that which is accidental entirely from that which is *per se*.

47. Next, Aristotle argues that 'if there is one and the same Form (*εἶδος*) of the Forms (*ἰδεῶν*) and the particulars which share in them,⁹⁰ then there will be something in common between them; but if they have not the same Form, then they would be equivocal terms',⁹¹ and there would no longer be any community between them. But the Platonists will reply that there is no need for model and copy to have another Form in common; and even if they are equivocal terms, as in fact they are, it is still not true that there would no longer be any community between them. Or do you assert—they will ask Aristotle—that there is no community between things when you call them equivocal? On the contrary, nowhere do you say anything of the kind, nor could you do so. At the same time, however, no doubt inspired by malice towards us, you pretend to be unaware of the fact that in some cases equivocal terms do not have anything in common with each other and in others they have: thus it cannot be said that the statue of Lysander has nothing in common with Lysander, nor that every copy has nothing in common with its model.

48. Again, he asks, 'what do the Forms contribute to objects of sense, whether the latter be eternal or whether they come into existence and perish, since the Forms are not causes of movement or of any kind of change in them?'⁹² Here Aristotle has clearly exposed the motive for his hostility to the Forms. The reason is that he neither believes nor wants it to be the case that there is any cause of the being and existence of eternal things, but only of their motion. What else is his meaning in asking 'what do the Forms contribute to objects of sense, whether the latter be eternal or whether they come into existence and perish, since the Forms are not causes of movement or of any kind of change in them?' Evidently in the case of things which come into existence and perish, he thinks himself to assign to them, as sufficient causes, generating agents of the same kind together with the sun;⁹³ he denies that objects of sense which are eternal owe their movement to the Forms;⁹⁴ and he does not believe that any cause whatever is necessary for their essence and being.⁹⁵ So this is why he asks, what do the Forms contribute to the objects of sense?

⁹⁰ The basic meanings of *εἶδος* and *ἰδέα* are the same: 'form', 'species', or 'class'.

⁹¹ *Met.* i. 991^a2-6.

⁹² *Ibid.* 991^a9-11.

⁹³ *De Gen. et Corr.* ii. 336^a15-19.

⁹⁴ *Met.* xii. 1071^b12-16.

⁹⁵ This follows from Aristotle's belief that the universe is eternal and subject to the Prime Mover: *Met.* xii. 1072^a23-6.

49. Now, it might be said that he thinks the cause in this case must belong to the supreme God alone. But although anyone else could say this, Aristotle could not. Why not? Because if he did he would be contradicting himself. For I challenge his own adherents to explain this point: why did he not attribute to one and the same God all the movements of all the heavenly bodies, and why did he postulate a different motive force for each different movement?⁹⁶ Is it not obviously because of that axiom of his own, which he himself somewhere lays down: one effect, one cause?⁹⁷ Clearly the same axiom requires that, given a number of eternal beings, he must postulate a number of productive causes, if he believes them to have a cause at all; though it would not be wholly unthinkable that the causes, producing copies of themselves, should in fact be the models of that which they produce. Thus in this case Aristotle would be in accord with the Theory of Forms. But he clearly does not believe that these eternal beings have a productive cause at all: they are simply there, being as they are, by chance, and moving towards an end, which is God.⁹⁸

50. Yet, he says, the Forms 'neither contribute to knowledge of other things, since they are not the essence of such things—if they were, they would be in them—nor do the Forms contribute to their being, since they are not immanent in the things which participate in them'.⁹⁹ Now, who will be the best judge of a copy? Surely the man who knows the model, for the man who does not know it could not judge the copy equally well with the man who does. And why should not the Forms contribute to the being of other things, without being immanent in them, if in fact they were their causes?¹⁰⁰

51. Next, according to Aristotle, the theory means that 'the Forms are not only models of objects of sense but also of themselves (as for example the genus is in relation *qua* genus to species): so that the same thing will be both model and copy'.¹⁰¹ Now, if it were the case that a single thing were both model and copy of the same thing, then the argument would indeed result in an absurdity, just as if a single thing were at the same time both larger and smaller than the same thing. But in the present case why should not the same thing be both a copy of one thing and model of another, just as a painter might paint a copy of a statue which is itself a copy, and an image of it again might be reflected on water? So much for Aristotle's twittering.¹⁰²

52. Let us turn to another point he makes. He says next that 'even granted the existence of the Forms, still what comes into existence does not do so without a motive force; while many other things come to exist—for example,

⁹⁶ *Met.* xii. 1073^a26-38.

⁹⁷ Aristotle never used this precise phrase. The nearest approximation is in *De Gen. et Corr.* ii. 336^a27-8: 'Nature has ordained that the same thing, so long as it remains in the same state, always produces the same result.'

⁹⁸ *Met.* xii. 1073^a23-6; 1074^a25-31.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* i. 991^a12-14.

¹⁰⁰ *Phaedo*, 100 c.

¹⁰¹ *Met.* i. 991^a29-31.

¹⁰² The word 'twitterings' (*τερετίσματα*) was used contemptuously of the Theory of Forms by Aristotle, *Anal. Post.* i. 83^a33.

a house or a ring—of which the Platonists do not postulate Forms; so it clearly follows that things of which the Platonists do postulate Forms may well both exist and come into existence through such causes as do the things mentioned’—and not through the Forms at all.¹⁰³ But the proponents of the Forms will reply that even these objects do not come into existence without models, although the models are not self-subsistent; for they come to exist through models conceived in the souls of their particular craftsmen. They will add, of course, that things which come into existence naturally must do so with the aid of a cause which is not only not inferior to that of these artefacts, nor even merely equivalent to it, but actually superior to it because they are themselves superior to artefacts.

53. Aristotle, however, would perhaps say that their models subsist in the mind of the sun, so there is no need of any other self-subsistent model. For Aristotle clearly makes the sun the cause of generation of whatever comes into existence.¹⁰⁴ To this the proponents of the Forms will no doubt reply as follows: ‘But Aristotle, if we saw natural things being brought into existence by the sun in the same way as we see these artefacts being created by their individual craftsmen, we should agree with your argument. As it is, we see that while these artefacts are in the hands of their craftsmen, who are there present and working on them, they progress towards their particular state of completion; but when they are left half-completed by their own craftsmen, they no longer make progress towards anything, because the craftsmen, in withdrawing themselves, withdraw not only their hands but also their models. On the other hand, we see most natural products continue to progress towards their own state of completion even when the sun is absent—a fact which becomes most obvious in the case of fast-maturing plants and fruits, which can be seen to grow just as much by night as by day. Now the mind of the sun cannot be still maturing them at night, since it is impossible for these participating minds, when unaccompanied by their own bodies, to have any effect whatever on other bodies. All bodies require a position and conformation relative to the bodies which they are to affect; and this the sun would no longer have at night in relation to them. And while they cannot in that case be said to be brought to maturity by the sun, no more could they do it by themselves; for no potentiality can make the transition into actuality¹⁰⁵ without the impulse of another actuality, nor can anything potentially complete become actually complete without the impulse of something else that is actually more nearly complete. That is why’, they will say, ‘we ascribe to the Forms the act which in this case brings such things to a state of completeness’. And we divide the totality of separate Forms into those which are by themselves capable of achieving their results and those which are not so capable, assigning the former as models and

¹⁰³ *Met.* i. 991^b4-9 (slightly misquoted).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* xii. 1071^a15; *De Gen. et Corr.* ii. 336^b17-19.

¹⁰⁵ *Met.* ix. 1049^b24-5.

causes to eternal things here and the latter to perishable things here, since the latter need the co-operation of the sun to prepare material for them, but when they have taken hold of their material they are able to operate on it by themselves.

54. 'We are making no innovation', they will say, 'nor are we inventing new causes, as you suggest;¹⁰⁶ we are merely giving a complete account of the causes of existing things, whereas yours is defective. For you do indeed distinguish four kinds of causes,¹⁰⁷ but you appear to make use of only three of them yourself—the final cause, the principal (efficient) cause of motion, and the material cause—but of the remaining formal cause you make no use at all. For if you say that the Form embodied in each object of sense is for you its formal cause, it is perfectly clear that this must be not a cause but an effect and product of some other cause, just as the matter in each object is the offshoot and product of the matter of the whole universe. We, on the other hand', they will say, 'attribute to God, as universal sovereign, the final and supreme form of causes, not only of movements but of the essences and all existing things; and we set up these Forms as models for existing things, ascribing the initiating cause of motion to the reigning soul of this universe and the material cause to the matter of the whole universe, thus making a complete allocation of all forms of causes to existing things.'¹⁰⁸

55. Such, more or less, will be the reply of the proponents of the Forms, demonstrating that their arguments are consistent with their own hypotheses; proving that Aristotle is in some cases guilty of misrepresentation, in others that he reaches no conclusion, and in others exposing his ignorance of the most important matters. For is not Aristotle demonstrably ignorant of the most important matters in the light both of the numerous examples we have given and especially of the most important point—that he denies the creation of eternal substances and the relation of all things to the one source of their being; whereas Plato and the Platonists, on the contrary, place God as universal sovereign over all existing things, and assume him to be the originator of originators, the creator of creators, and refer everything without exception to him? And to all that it must be added that Plato makes it clear that he follows some of his predecessors and contradicts others, whereas Aristotle is hostile to all of them and castigates them all. Even in the few cases where Aristotle has used the arguments of his predecessors, it is clear that here again he does not in the least want to be seen to be using other people's arguments. This is a practice typical of sophists, and entirely alien to the conduct of philosophers. There is an example of it at the end of his work on Logic, where he boasts that the system is entirely his own, and implies not that parts of the system already existed and parts did not, but that the system itself was totally non-existent

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. i. 991^b3-4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. i. 983^a26-32; *Physics*, ii. 194^b23-35.

¹⁰⁸ *Timaeus*, 29 E. ff.

before him.¹⁰⁹ The fact is that Archytas had written a work on logic before him, some parts of which he has himself used; and Plato himself sets out the fundamentals of logic on the one hand, and on the other hand uses logical terms with some skill at every point; and he speaks of logical method as already existing, not as non-existent nor as not yet invented, but as fully in use.

56. So what is one to say? Is it then not worth while to study the works of Aristotle? Certainly it is worth while, for what is useful in them. But at the same time one must take note that a great number of fallacies are mixed up in them.

¹⁰⁹ *De Soph. Elench.* xxxiv. 184^b2-3.

XII

YEARS OF RESPITE

PLETHON'S summary of his lectures makes clear his estimation of the gaps and errors in western understanding of classical Greek philosophy. The gaps appear mainly in the case of Plato, the errors in the case of Aristotle. This was natural, since the process of translating Plato into Latin, which had been started systematically (apart from the *Timaeus*, *Meno*, and *Phaedo*) only at the turn of the century, was still far from complete and had not yet incorporated the more difficult metaphysical dialogues. On the other hand, the works of Aristotle were so well known as to be taken too readily for granted; and in Plethon's eyes they had become encrusted in misinterpretation, due chiefly to the Arabic commentators but perhaps also to Aquinas and Dante. His view must have been shared to some extent by the Florentine humanists, for Lionardo Bruni, the pioneering translator of Plato, had also made fresh translations of some of Aristotle's works, including the *Ethics* and *Politics*; but even he had not touched Aristotle's metaphysical works, which were Plethon's principal target.

What then would his Italian audience have learned from Plethon's lectures? They were invited to distrust some of the interpreters of Aristotle, especially Averroes and Avicenna (paras. 1 and 5 of *De Differentiis*), but also Alexander of Aphrodisias (para. 20). Suspicion was even cast on Aristotle himself. The analysis of his philosophy alleges defects in almost every field: in logic (paras. 6-8, 15-16, 55); in metaphysics (paras. 9-14, 33-6); in psychology (paras. 17-20); in ethics (paras. 21-5); in cosmology (paras. 26-32); and especially in his misconception of the Theory of Forms (paras. 37-54).

Although Plethon denies any personal hostility towards Aristotle, his language is sometimes offensive. Aristotle, he says, was sophistical (para. 55)—the most damning epithet in Plethon's vocabulary; he was inconsistent (paras. 8, 20); his criticisms of Plato were polemical (paras. 2, 55); and although his work was not worthless, the useful parts of it were mixed up with 'a great number of fallacies' (para. 56). Only in the physical sciences does Aristotle pass the test, at least by tacit implication; but as Plethon shows by his references to

'embryos and shellfish' (paras. 4, 29), he regards this aspect of Aristotle's intellectual capacity as a matter for irony bordering on contempt.

Evidently the most important gap in the westerners' understanding of Plato was the Theory of Forms. Their grasp of the theory was derived largely from the highly critical presentation of it by Aristotle, particularly in the *Metaphysics*. Of the Platonic dialogues in which it was developed, the *Republic* was still in process of being translated into Latin; the *Symposium* had been translated only in part, and the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* not at all; and although there were two translations of the *Phaedo* available (the most recent by Bruni), it was still not widely known nor approved by the Church. So the Theory of Forms was the largest gap which Plethon saw to be filled: hence more than one-third of the text of *De Differentiis* is devoted to it. It is noteworthy that this is the only part of the essay on which Scholarios had no direct comment to make in his *Defence of Aristotle*. He declared his intention to do so in another work, but this appears never to have been written.¹

In Scholarios' judgement, the motive of Plethon's criticism of Aristotle was not philosophical at all but anti-Christian. It was, he thought, mere hypocrisy on Plethon's part to argue that Plato could be reconciled with Christianity more effectively than Aristotle. Scholarios was probably right, but he was confronting an extremely subtle controversialist. Plethon was ostensibly cautious in his advocacy of Platonism. He would argue that he was not personally endorsing Plato's theories (para. 37) and he would usually speak of the Platonists as 'they' (para. 42 and elsewhere); but occasionally a revealing 'we' would be let slip (paras. 12, 23). Above all he insisted on the telling point that Plato believed in the creation of the world by a supreme God, whereas Aristotle appeared not to do so (paras. 3, 49, 54-5). He even accused Aristotle of 'inclining towards atheism' (para. 32) and of 'weakening belief in the deity' (para. 34). These accusations became still more explicit in his later *Reply to Scholarios' Defence of Aristotle*.

Plethon was arguing a case which was not wholly unprecedented in the West, although it had never before taken such a forcibly anti-Aristotelian form. That there were fundamental differences between Plato and Aristotle, and that these differences posed problems for both philosophers and theologians, had long been recognized in western Europe. The case for preferring Plato to Aristotle went back

¹ Scholarios, iv. 113. 26-7.

to St Augustine in the fifth century; appreciation of Aristotle began somewhat diffidently in the thirteenth century, thanks to Albertus Magnus and his pupil, Thomas Aquinas. Even Aquinas' theology remained suspect for fifty years after his death. There were also still philosophers who questioned Aristotle's metaphysics, scientists who criticized his physics, and mystics who clung to Neoplatonism. A few theologians sought a middle way between Plato and Aristotle, trying to reconcile them with each other and both with Christianity. But almost all were handicapped by ignorance of Greek and the lack of adequate translations of Plato.

A weightier judgement in favour of Plato was that of Lionardo Bruni, because it rested on first-hand knowledge. In the introduction to his translation of the *Phaedo* he argued that Plato could be reconciled with Christian theology because he believed in the immortality of the soul; and in the introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, he asked rhetorically whether St Paul's teaching differed from that of Plato.² Whatever the scholastics might think, these words must have been welcome to the humanists, who were already familiar with Neoplatonism through Latin sources, such as Pseudo-Apuleius and Lactantius. It mattered little that they were unaware of the extent to which Neoplatonism deviated from the pure philosophy of Plato.

In these circumstances a philosopher who could expound Platonism and Aristotelianism in a passable imitation of classical Greek was sure of an interested audience. Yet the impact of Plethon's lectures on the Italians remains hard to assess. Very few of them left any record of their impressions; none of them is more than superficial and secondhand. The case of Cosimo de' Medici, recorded by Ficino, is the only major exception; an additional but minor one is Grigorio Tifernate.³ Although *De Differentiis* was written for the benefit of Italian humanists,⁴ none can be named who read it in Plethon's lifetime. But there is a strong tradition that Plethon impressed many westerners by his personality and learning. It is confirmed by Filelfo's letters; by the two panegyrists who spoke at his funeral; by Sigismondo Malatesta in the inscription on his tomb at Rimini; by Niccolò Capranica and Battista Platina in their funeral panegyrics on Bessarion;⁵ by Giovanni Corsi in his life of Ficino;⁶ by Maffeo di Volterra in his

² L. Bruni, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, ed. H. Baron (Berlin 1928), 4, 72.

³ See p. 161 above.

⁴ PG 160, 1017 C-D.

⁵ Mohler, iii. 406; PG 160, 796 n. (4).

⁶ H. J. Hak, *Marsilio Ficino* (Amsterdam 1934), 179.

account of learned contemporaries;⁷ by Marcus Antonius Antimachus, Plethon's early translator; and by other Italians of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who mentioned him in passing.⁸ His reputation in the West was also promoted by pupils and disciples such as Bessarion, who settled in Rome in 1441, and probably also John Argyropoulos, who taught at Florence from 1456; but the controversy among the expatriate Greeks between Platonists and Aristotelians,⁹ which often involved the name of Plethon, can only have given the Italians the impression that his reputation was at least questionable.

It is understandable, as Scholarios was later to point out, that Plethon's appeal was to the humanists rather than the theologians and scholastics. There were, it was true, some open-minded theologians such as Ambrogio Traversari; but for the most part the Church was still represented by men like Antonino Pierozzi, who became Archbishop of Florence in 1446 and led a strong reaction against 'Platonic hellenism'. There were even some western ecclesiastics who condemned the study of Greek altogether, as was still the case in the following century.¹⁰ But for the humanists to hear a Greek lecturing on Greek philosophy was an exhilarating experience, even if they did not understand everything he was saying.

The impact of Plethon's lectures on the scholastics in his audience is harder to assess. That there were some of them present is implied by Scholarios' statement that the Platonists 'were recently worsted in Italy';¹¹ and Filelfo's letter to him in March 1439 shows that Scholarios himself took part in the debates which arose.¹² But Plethon claimed that Scholarios (and therefore, by implication, the other Aristotelians) had the worst of the argument.¹³

There is no independent account by which to judge between them, but circumstantial evidence rather favours Scholarios. Few of the Italian humanists before the generation of Ficino and the Platonic Academy had much skill in metaphysics. Even when the controversy between Platonists and Aristotelians broke out afresh in the 1450s, it was conducted entirely between expatriate Greeks, for no Italians were yet competent to take part. Despite Plethon's efforts, scholasticism still prevailed in the West for several generations. Even when

⁷ Maffei Volaterranus, *Commentariorum urbanorum libri XXXVIII* (Paris 1603), xxi. 774-5.

⁸ Knös, 149-50, 160-2.

⁹ For a summary of the dispute, see Mohler, i. 346-98; and pp. 365-73 below.

¹⁰ W. K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought* (Boston 1948), 57.

¹¹ Scholarios, iv. 4. 2-5.

¹² Legrand (1892), 31-3.

¹³ PG 160, 982 B-C.

Platonism began to spread northwards from Italy in the following century, its impact was rather on artists and poets than on professional philosophers and theologians.¹⁴

Plethon would have been disappointed by this outcome, but he would have been less disturbed by the more immediate consequence of the Council of Florence, which was the hostile reception of the Greek delegation on its return home. If it is correct to assume that he would have left the convoy at Methoni, he probably encountered that hostility only twice: once at Corfu¹⁵ and once at Methoni itself.¹⁶ The later stages of the journey to Constantinople, which became more and more melancholy for the Emperor's party, can have been known to Plethon only by hearsay. Probably he never left Mistra again after his return in 1440 (though it was at one time incorrectly believed that he attended an anti-Unionist Council— itself almost certainly fictitious—at Constantinople in 1450).¹⁷ He resumed his life of writing and teaching, which lasted for another twelve years.

He sent copies of *De Differentiis* to a number of friends. The Italian humanists had first claim, for it had been written for their benefit. The original manuscript was presumably carried by Bessarion himself, who had returned to Greece with the delegation but went back to Italy in 1441 to assume the rank of Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. It survives among Bessarion's personal collection in the Library of San Marco.¹⁸ Many copies survive in other libraries.¹⁹

Greek friends also received copies. Among them presumably was the Despot Constantine, since when Scholarios wrote his *Defence of Aristotle* in reply, he addressed it to Constantine.²⁰ The Emperor himself did not have a copy, for he indicated in a letter to Plethon that he knew about it only at second hand.²¹ Nor did Scholarios receive a copy, until he personally demanded to see it—a matter on which he later expressed much indignation.²² There was no good reason why Plethon should have made special arrangements to send him a copy, since *De Differentiis* was not directed against Scholarios as the *Defence of Aristotle* was to be directed against Plethon. The controversy between them had not yet begun.

¹⁴ See pp. 373-9 below.

¹⁵ Syropoulos, xi. 13.

¹⁶ Ibid. 14.

¹⁷ J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, xxxii (Paris 1902), 101; H. Vast, *Le Cardinal Bessarion* (Paris 1878), 133-5.

¹⁸ Masai (1954), 540-1.

¹⁹ PG 160, 777-80.

²⁰ Scholarios, iv. 1. 5; 9. 1-3.

²¹ Lambros, iii. 330.

²² Scholarios, iv. 1.

The royal brothers, who had a hereditary taste for philosophy, were later to become involved in the controversy, but for the present they had other preoccupations. Chief among them was the question of the Union: was it to become effective or not? During 1442 the Emperor's brother Demetrios, who had earned Scholarios' approval by leaving Florence prematurely,²³ tried unsuccessfully to take possession of Constantinople with Turkish support. The fact that he was defeated and taken prisoner suggests that the populace failed to rally to him. But the Greek historians record many examples of hostility to the Union, particularly among the poorer classes. They were further stimulated by Mark Eugenikos when he returned to the capital at the end of 1442.

Syropoulos, who completed his *Memoirs* between 1443 and 1445, recorded that most of those who signed the decree of Union (including himself) soon recanted.²⁴ More precise figures were tabulated by Scholarios.²⁵ Apart from two (including the Patriarch) who died before the date of signature and one whom he left uncertain, twenty-two of those in holy orders signed and repented, seven signed and did not repent, and only two (Mark Eugenikos and the Bishop of Stavropolis) refused to sign. But Syropoulos also said that if the late Patriarch had lived to defend the Union, 'very few would have abstained from communion with him'.²⁶ The contemporaneous Russian accounts of the Council, however, were uniformly hostile to Isidore for having accepted the Union.

The Emperor himself was doubtful whether he had done right. In the tradition of his family, he was a keen student of theology and philosophy, which he would debate with any sincere interlocutor of any persuasion. When a papal delegation came to Constantinople in 1444 to insist on promulgation of the Union, the Emperor personally presided at a series of debates between them and the Greek anti-Unionists. Mark Eugenikos had probably died shortly before these debates began, so the leading role was taken by Scholarios.²⁷ Convinced by his arguments, the Emperor began to shift decisively to an anti-Unionist position, but he would not finally renounce the Union. He used to attend both Greek and Latin liturgies impartially, accompanied by his courtiers to both.

Far away in the Peloponnese, Plethon played no part in the painful controversy. He was living in a predominantly pro-Unionist environ-

²³ Scholarios, iii. 118, 126.

²⁵ Scholarios, iii. 194-5.

²⁴ Syropoulos, xii. 13.

²⁶ Syropoulos, xii. 17.

²⁷ Zisis, 165-6.

ment at Mistra, but open mindedness prevailed in theology as well as philosophy. Apart from Mark Eugenikos, his pupils, admirers, and friends mostly supported the Union. Bessarion, Michael Apostoles, and John Argyropoulos were among the staunchest Latinophiles. Constantine, who was Despot at Mistra from 1443 to 1449, also supported the Union, in contrast with his brother Demetrios, who succeeded him at Mistra when he became Emperor on the death of John VIII. Most of the neighbouring bishops—Lacedaemon (Sparta), Amyklai, Monemvasia, Maina—were also Unionists.

Plethon had no obligation to commit himself either way. He did not care which variant of Christianity prevailed, for he thought the days of both were numbered in any case. The 1440s were years of strenuous work at his own writing. Of his many autograph manuscripts surviving in the Library of San Marco, to which Bessarion bequeathed them, it seems that the majority date from the years immediately after his return from Florence.²⁸ They include the autograph of his *Reply to Scholarios' Defence of Aristotle* as well as *De Differentiis*. But most of them are not concerned with philosophy. The summaries and excerpts from classical authors seem to belong to this period, including Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Lucian, Diogenes Laertius, Strabo, Appian, Diodorus Siculus, Quintus Smyrnaeus, Aristoxenus, Aristides Quintilianus, and others. Two Byzantine historians—Cedrenus and Zonaras—are in the collection, and also copies of a few post-classical poems: the Golden Verses attributed to Pythagoras, the Orphic Hymns, and those attributed to Proclus. The collection shows the breadth of Plethon's interests in his later years, and also the vigour of his mind and pen at a date when he was approaching ninety years of age.

Of all his personal manuscripts, the one which attracted most attention, to judge from the frequency with which it was copied, was *On the Events among the Greeks after the Battle of Mantinea*.²⁹ It was a summary, based on Plutarch and Diodorus Siculus, of the consequences of the battle in 362 BC between the Spartans and the Thebans under Epaminondas (who was killed, though victorious, in the action). The interest of Plethon's summary is that it gives special attention to Sicily and to Plato's experiences there. According to Plutarch, Plato visited Sicily three times: once when Dionysius I was tyrant of Syracuse, and

²⁸ Diller (1956), 27-41.

²⁹ H. G. Reichard, *Georgii Gemisti Plethonis de iis quae post pugnam Mantinensem apud Graecos gesta sunt libri II* (Leipzig 1770), esp. pp. 33-49.

twice under his son, Dionysius II; but only the third visit, in 361/0, fell after the battle of Mantinea. Diodorus does not record the second and third visits, but Plethon's summary contains elements from all three.

Plato's later mission was supposedly to train Dionysius II as a 'philosopher-king', but it was a failure. The young tyrant was said to have quarrelled with Plato. He was twice deposed, and died in exile. But he acknowledged that Plato's tuition had at least enabled him to bear adversity philosophically, and he blamed his quarrel with Plato on the common misfortune of tyrants, that men around them would not speak frankly to them. He admitted that it was such men who had deprived him of Plato's friendship.³⁰

The passage in Plethon's summary describing Plato's experiences in Sicily begins as follows:

Plato is also present there from Athens, having travelled to these parts of Italy and Sicily to study the cities there and their constitutions. When he joined this tyrant (Dionysius), who was the most powerful of the Greeks there, intending to try whether some divine chance would enable him, by prompting him towards philosophy, to be the source of great benefits to the cities over which he ruled, knowing that tyrants have the greatest power in whatever they might set themselves to do, whether good or ill. . . .³¹

Plethon appears here to have confused the elder Dionysius, who was tyrant during Plato's first visit (which was for purposes of political enquiry), with the younger, who was to become Plato's pupil in philosophy.

The main interest of Plethon's summary, however, lies in the emphasis which it gives to Plato's experiences, as well as to his belief that a moral revolution was the essential preliminary to political recovery. This has suggested that the work may have been intended as an admonition to the royal family. One theory is that it may have been aimed at Manuel II, whose pact with Mehmet I in 1413 had restored to the Empire a large area of lost territory.³² The argument is doubtful, and the date is impossible if Plethon's autograph is correctly dated to the 1440s, which is probable but not proven. A likelier target in that case might have been the Despot Constantine, who took over responsibility for the Morea jointly with his brother Thomas in 1443. But it is at least as likely that the summary was prepared simply as a teaching instrument by Plethon for his own pupils.

³⁰ Reichard, *op. cit.* 84.

³¹ *Ibid.* 34-5.

³² J. Dräseke, 'Zu Platon und Plethon', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 27 (1914), 294. See p. 109 above.

There was still a distinction to be drawn in the last phase of Plethon's life between his pupils in the strict sense and the adherents and admirers who sought admission to his esoteric philosophy. Of the former, only a few can be named with certainty, as in his earlier years. The latter formed a wider circle, extending outside Greece to Italy and perhaps even further afield.

It was presumably during these years that Laonikos Chalkokondyles, the future historian, became a pupil at Mistra. Born at Athens about 1423, he would hardly have been old enough to study under Plethon before the visit to Italy. He was at Mistra in the summer of 1447, when he met the Italian traveller Cyriac of Ancona, who called him Nikolaos, inverting the two parts of his first name.³³ There is no trace in his historical writing of the philosophical influence of Plethon, except perhaps distantly in the fact that his main interest was in the rise of the Ottoman Empire. He probably received no more than a conventional education at Plethon's hands.

The same is true of John Moschos, who is sometimes described as Plethon's successor in maintaining the educational traditions of Mistra.³⁴ He was born at Constantinople, but there is no evidence of the date of his birth nor of his arrival at Mistra. He taught there until his death in 1494. Among his pupils were a number of young Italians, one of whom, Marcus Antonius Antimachus, became a distinguished Hellenist. Antimachus studied at Mistra from 1489 to 1494, leaving for home on Moschos' death.³⁵ With the encouragement of his father, and presumably also of Moschos, he became an early translator of Plethon, whose works he warmly admired. There is no evidence that he, or any other Italian, learned anything of Plethon's esoteric philosophy from Moschos, nor that Moschos had any knowledge of it to impart. But it is clear that the tradition of humanism, and the memory of Plethon, survived at Mistra.

Another example is the case of Demetrios Tribolis, who was also associated with Plethon's last years. He was a scholarly bibliophile and copyist born into a family with a distinguished record at Mistra and Constantinople.³⁶ In one of his manuscripts he described himself as 'a Peloponnesian from Sparta'; and since some of his manuscripts

³³ Bodnar, 58.

³⁴ Masai (1956), 363.

³⁵ Legrand (1962), i, p. lxxxix; Lilius Gregorius Gyraldus, *De poetis nostrorum temporum*, ed. K. Wotke (Berlin 1894), 48-9.

³⁶ A. Oleroff, 'Démétrius Trivolis, copiste et bibliophile', *Scriptorium*, 4 (1950), 260-3; E. Gamillscheg and D. Harlfinger (edd.), *Repertorium der griechischen Kopisten, 800-1600*, i. A (Vienna 1981), 73.

can be dated to the 1450s, he was evidently of an age to have known Plethon personally.³⁷ There is no direct evidence that he was ever Plethon's pupil, but in later life, after escaping to Italy, he worked as a copyist of manuscripts with Michael Apostoles, who was one of Plethon's most devoted adherents in his last years.³⁸ Tribolis was still at work in 1482.

Apostoles was born about 1422 at Constantinople, and devoted his life to scholarship and controversy. It was not until 1450 or 1451 that he approached Plethon with a view to becoming his pupil. He wrote to tell Plethon that it was he who had surreptitiously obtained for him a copy of Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle*, which Scholarios had withheld, and sent it to him by the hand of a certain Darius of Crete.³⁹ He declared himself to be in love with 'the divine Plato', and begged to be allowed to join 'the chorus of your pupils'.⁴⁰ He also tried to use the influence of John Argyropoulos, to whom two letters from Apostoles are extant, to persuade Plethon to accept him.

Argyropoulos had known Plethon personally at least since the Council of Union, which both attended. By chance, their names are linked in the same sentence by the historian Michael Doukas, who does not otherwise mention either of them.⁴¹ Argyropoulos is not mentioned by Syropoulos either. Evidently he played no conspicuous part at the Council, being still a very young man (born about 1415). Later his influence on Greek studies in Italy became powerful. He was primarily an Aristotelian, but he also had a great respect for Plato, perhaps under Plethon's influence. But Argyropoulos' wholehearted support for the Union led to a disagreement with Plethon, which expressed itself in Plethon's *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*.⁴² The *Treatise* was the work of Argyropoulos, but there is no reason to suppose that the disagreement affected their personal relations, especially since Plethon's interest in the argument was half-hearted and undogmatic.

Apostoles could reasonably expect that an intervention by Argyropoulos with Plethon on his behalf would be successful. His two letters to Argyropoulos, written from Crete, were couched in the extravagantly pagan language which he presumably thought would appeal at

³⁷ Legrand (1962), i, p. cxxxiii n. 2.

³⁸ M. Wittek, 'Pour une étude du scriptorium de Michel Apostolès et consorts', *Scriptorium*, 7 (1953), 290-7.

³⁹ Masai (1956), 312, and references cited.

⁴⁰ Alexandre, 370-1; Legrand (1962), ii, 233.

⁴¹ Doukas, 267. 21-2.

⁴² Masai (1956), 389-92.

least to Plethon.⁴³ He invoked the names of Zeus, Poseidon, Hermes, Demeter, Apollo; and as he was writing from Crete, he added Minos and Rhadamanthys for good measure. He called Plethon 'god-revering' (*θεοσεβής*) and 'god-fearing' (*δεισίθεος*)—terms which did not necessarily imply orthodoxy. The whole tone of his letters implies a clandestine knowledge which he shared with Plethon, and also naturally with Argyropoulos. But it is not known whether his approach was successful, nor even whether Argyropoulos supported it. It may have come too late, when Plethon had only a year or two to live.

A few others who sought indoctrination in Plethon's last years, with greater or less success, are also known by name. Gregorios the monk was evidently accepted as a pupil;⁴⁴ Hieronimos Charitonimos was not.⁴⁵ The heretic Juvenal, whose execution Scholarios welcomed in 1451,⁴⁶ may have had contact with Plethon in his last years, but of this there is no direct evidence. Scholarios clearly saw his execution as a blow struck indirectly at Plethon's heresies, though he was careful not to connect Plethon with him by name.⁴⁷ The Peloponnese, according to Scholarios, was 'more fertile soil for this evil seed than elsewhere';⁴⁸ and he certainly held Plethon partly responsible for this corruption.

But of course it was possible to live and study in the Peloponnese without being corrupted. As the Turks expanded their conquests in the north while the Greeks recovered Peloponnesian territory from the Franks, Mistra became an increasingly attractive place of refuge for intellectuals of all sorts. A distinguished member of the new influx was John Eugenikos, who came to Mistra in 1440, returned later to the capital, but came back about 1450, disgusted by the last Emperor's efforts to enforce the Union.⁴⁹ He first held an official position as magistrate—Scholarios addressed him as 'guardian of the laws (*νομοφύλαξ*) in the Peloponnese'⁵⁰—and later became bishop of Lacedaemon.⁵¹ But whatever his contacts with Plethon, he remained incorruptible by heresy.

There was probably a new influx of Greeks to Mistra in and after 1446, when the Turks followed their defeat of the last Crusaders at Varna (1444) by overrunning the northern mainland of Greece down to the Isthmus of Corinth, breaching the Hexamilion by cannon-fire, and

⁴³ Alexandre, 372-5; Masai (1956), 312-13.

⁴⁴ PG 160, 818 B.

⁴⁶ Scholarios, iv. 482-3.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 476-89.

⁴⁵ PG 160, 811 B-12 A.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 479. 18-19.

⁴⁹ C. N. Tsirpanlis, 'John Eugenikos and the Council of Florence', *Byzantion*, 48. 1 (1978), 273.

⁵⁰ Scholarios, iv. 454. 21.

⁵¹ Zakythinos, ii. 286.

invading the Peloponnese. Among the refugees from Athens was George Chalkokondyles, the father of Plethon's pupil Laonikos. Another arrival in 1446 was George Sphrantzes, the future historian, whom the Despot Constantine appointed governor of Mistra and the surrounding district. He too remained uninfluenced by Plethon, though they must have known each other.

Others talked of taking refuge at Mistra without actually doing so. One was Scholarios, who had hinted at his intention as early as 1435-6, when there was plague at Constantinople which carried off two of his nephews.⁵² Another, some years later, was Matthew Kamariotes, who wrote to Kabakes regretting that he was unable to carry out his plan to join him (and also Plethon) at Mistra.⁵³ Kabakes was Plethon's most devoted follower, but the company of Scholarios or Kamariotes would soon have proved much less welcome, to judge from their criticisms of Plethon after his death.

Another possible addition to the list in Plethon's last years is Andronikos Kallistos (Callistus), who later taught Greek in Italy and also visited England, where he probably died in 1486. He was born at Thessalonica and educated at Constantinople, but he probably spent some time at Mistra, for Francesco Filelfo, who befriended him in Italy, addressed a poem to him saying that he 'left the land of Lycurgus, having great ambitions in his soul'.⁵⁴ In Italy he took part in the controversy between Platonists and Aristotelians which followed Plethon's death. Since he wrote a treatise criticizing Michael Apostoles for an intemperate attack on Theodore Gazis and the Aristotelian opponents of Plethon, he was evidently not an adherent of Plethon's esoteric philosophy.⁵⁵ Nor was his friend Nicholas Secundinus, who wrote to congratulate him on his reply to Apostoles.⁵⁶ Secundinus was nevertheless an intimate friend of Plethon's, since it was to him that Bessarion sent a copy of his letter to Plethon's sons on the death of their father.⁵⁷ But there is no positive evidence that Secundinus was ever at Mistra.

Fragmentary though the evidence is, it seems clear that Plethon's last years were sustained by many intellectual friendships, whether in person or by correspondence; and that some of his friends may be described as pupils or adherents, and others as neutrals or even critics. The tributes to his fame in the two funeral orations were

⁵² Scholarios, iv. 417. 11-15, 416. 23-5.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 203.

⁵⁵ Mohler, iii. 170-203.

⁵⁷ Alexandre, 407-8; Masai (1956), 310-11.

⁵³ Legrand (1892), 312.

⁵⁶ PG 161, 691-8 n. (1).

justified. So was their claim that admiration for him extended beyond the Greek world to what the monk Gregorios called 'the best of the Romans'⁵⁸ and Charitonimos called 'the barbarians'.⁵⁹

Chief among his Italian admirers was Sigismondo Malatesta, although it is questionable whether they ever met. Another was Francesco Filelfo, who sent Plethon a flattering letter in Greek on 1 March 1441.⁶⁰ In another letter to his friend Sassuolo of Prato, dated 7 June of the same year, he spoke warmly of Plethon, whom he still called Gemistos (or rather, Gemystus), but at the same time he advised his friend against visiting the Peloponnese.⁶¹

The Peloponnese, he said, was in a deplorable condition. Despite its brilliant past, it had become an intellectual desert. The only exception was 'Gemystus', who was 'learned, serious, and eloquent (*disertus*)', but it was doubtful whether a visit to the Peloponnese would be justified by a meeting with him alone, for he was already 'pretty aged (*admodum senex*)'. In every respect it would be better for Sassuolo to make for Constantinople, where he would enjoy learned company and brilliant conversation; but he might make a brief digression to visit 'Gemystus' on the way. It is unknown whether Sassuolo followed Filelfo's advice.

At least one other friend of Filelfo's took a more optimistic view. Cyriac of Ancona revisited the Peloponnese in the summer of 1447, and spent several months there. On 30 July he met the Despot Constantine at Mistra, and found with him 'that man who is both the most learned of the Greeks in our time, and in life and morals, and in teaching the most brilliant and influential philosopher among the Platonists'.⁶² He did not even need to name Plethon. But he described how they compared their manuscripts of Strabo and exchanged notes. While at Mistra, Cyriac wrote an ode to Sparta, which was translated into Greek, perhaps by Plethon, and still survives.⁶³ Cyriac also wrote out in Greek a summary of Dictys' supposed diary of the Trojan War, which survived only in Latin. This summary also survives, with a single correction in Plethon's hand-writing.⁶⁴

Cyriac left Mistra on a tour of Messenia and the Mani, but he returned to spend the winter at Mistra, again, as he put it, '*gemistei platonici dilectissimi nostri gratia*'.⁶⁵ During this last visit, on 4 February

⁵⁸ PG 160, 813 D.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 807 C.

⁶⁰ Legrand (1892), 48.

⁶¹ Filelfo, *Epistole* (Paris 1503?), p. lvij; Alexandre, p. xx n. 1.

⁶² Bodnar, 57.

⁶³ Lambros, iv. 99-101.

⁶⁴ Bodnar, 62.

⁶⁵ Id. 60.

1448, he wrote in Greek an account of the Roman calendar for Plethon's benefit, which survives in Bessarion's bequest to the Library of San Marco.⁶⁶ Cyriac was not an intellectual of Plethon's calibre, but he was an engaging companion and a fellow pagan. It deserves notice that after his return to Italy, he was at Rimini in June 1449.⁶⁷ Perhaps his visit to Sigismondo Malatesta's principality contributed to inspiring that paradoxical man with his enthusiasm for Plethon.

Thanks to Plethon's Italian admirers, there grew up a kind of cult of humanism at Mistra, which drew young Italians to study there under John Moschos in the following generation. It survived for a time even after the Turks captured the little city in 1460. But by then the tradition of Neoplatonism had shifted to Italy, where Plethon's bones were also transferred in 1464. Plethon's devoted friends, even more than the writings of his later years, ensured an extraordinary vitality for that tradition.

His last years were exceptionally busy in other ways. As Filelfo told Sassuolo in his letter of June 1441, Plethon still held 'magistratum nescio quem', which must refer to the duties associated with the *πρόνοια* conferred on him by the imperial bulls of Theodore II and John VIII. He was also prolific in writing essays, treatises, addresses on various occasions, and correspondence with other philosophers. His correspondence arose chiefly from *De Differentiis*. No reactions to his discussion of Platonism and Aristotelianism survive from his Italian friends, but that is not surprising. Of the few competent Platonists in the West, Traversari died in 1439, soon after the Council dispersed, and Bruni in 1444. Perhaps only Lorenzo Valla would have been capable of debating with Plethon, but the speculation that either of them was aware of the work of the other remains unprovable.⁶⁸ The generation which was to form the Platonic Academy at Florence under the leadership of Marsilio Ficino (born in 1433) was still barely adult in the year of Plethon's death, and knew of him only by hearsay.

But in Greece there were serious and competent reactions to Plethon's essay. In three cases both the critical or questioning arguments and Plethon's answers to them are extant. The three interlocu-

⁶⁶ Diller (1956), 32; text in Lambros, iv. 96-8.

⁶⁷ Bodnar, 65.

⁶⁸ Masai (1956), 338. His supposition is rejected by S. I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla, umanesimo e teologia* (Florence 1972), 196.

tors were the Emperor John VIII, Bessarion, and Scholarios, the last of whom wrote an enormously long critique of *De Differentiis* under the title *Κατὰ τῶν Πλήθωνος ἀποριῶν ἐπ' Ἀριστοτέλει* ('Response to the problems of Plethon on Aristotle', known as the *Defence of Aristotle*). It is noticeable that the first two still addressed him as George Gemistos, not Plethon. Only Scholarios pretended to be in doubt whether the two names belonged to the same man.⁶⁹

It was characteristic of the pious and learned Emperor, even as the final crisis of Constantinople approached, to correspond with his even more learned subject.⁷⁰ Modestly he described himself as a novice ('newly enlightened') in philosophy. He raised two questions. The first concerns the paragraph in which Plethon criticized Aristotle for a breach of the principle of contradiction.⁷¹ The second concerns the definition of man as necessarily including the concept of mortality. As the letter says, the second point was not made in *De Differentiis*: 'Our master John Palaiologos, newly enlightened, says that you have written elsewhere that the concept of mortality necessarily belongs to the definition of man.'⁷² None of the extant works contains any passage precisely to that effect, but a number of passages bearing on the same theme have been collected by Dr Benakis, the modern editor of the text, from works of Plethon at various dates.⁷³

The form of the sentence quoted, in which the Emperor is the subject of the verb in the third person, shows that someone else wrote the letter for him, and perhaps even composed it or at least influenced it. Benakis suggests that the guiding hand may have been Scholarios himself, who was presumably at the imperial court at the time. Another indication of the same possibility is to be found in Plethon's reply to the Emperor's letter. He there makes a point about Aristotle 'concealing the feebleness of his argument by vagueness' and uses a phrase about 'the transference of the negative' from a verb to an adjective. Neither of these phrases occurs in *De Differentiis*, but both were later to be cited in Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle*.⁷⁴ So it is clear that Scholarios must at least have read the Emperor's letter even if he did not help to draft it. It also looks as if he had read *De Differentiis* earlier than he implies in his complaint to Plethon, at the beginning of the *Defence of Aristotle*,⁷⁵ about the delay in sending him a copy. He had in

⁶⁹ Scholarios, iv. 114-15.

⁷⁰ Text in L. G. Benakis, "Πλήθωνος πρὸς ἠρωτημένα ἄλλα ἀποκρίσεις", *Φιλοσοφία*, 4 (1974), 348-9; also in Lambros, iii. 330.

⁷¹ See Ch. XI, para. 15, on p. 197 above.

⁷² Benakis, *op. cit.* 349. 18-19.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 369-76.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 332-3.

⁷⁵ Scholarios, iv. 1.

any case heard the lectures in Florence on which *De Differentiis* was based, as is clear from Filelfo's letter to him of 29 March 1439.⁷⁶

Plethon's reply to the Emperor plunges straight into the first subject with a philosopher's directness and without any courtierly preamble. 'A man is sitting' and 'A man is not sitting' are no contradiction: that was not the point he was making against Aristotle.⁷⁷ He was referring rather to cases where the verb 'is' is used existentially as a third term in a proposition—for example, in the propositions: 'Man is white', meaning 'A white man exists', and 'Man is not white', meaning 'A white man does not exist'.⁷⁸ He goes on to quote the passage from Aristotle to which he was particularly referring:

But of those contradictory propositions which have universals for their subjects and which are universal in character, one must be true and the other false. This is also the case when the reference is to individuals, as in the propositions 'Socrates is white', 'Socrates is not white'. But when the two propositions are not universal in character, although they are about universals, it is not always the case that one is true and the other false. For one can say truly that man is white and that man is not white, and that man is beautiful and that man is not beautiful; for if a man is ugly, then he is not beautiful, and if he is progressing towards beauty, he is not yet beautiful.⁷⁹

This passage, according to Plethon, clearly accepts that there can be contradictory propositions which are both true. There is justice in his remark that in the last sentence quoted Aristotle 'conceals the feebleness of his argument by vagueness'.⁸⁰ (It is difficult even to convey the vagueness in translation, because it depends on the fact that in the Greek 'man' and 'a man' are indistinguishable.) The logical fault which he was concealing lay in the claim to have proved that if there exists a man who is not beautiful, then it is true to say that 'Man is not beautiful'.⁸¹ But these are different kinds of negations: the first is a negation only in terms of 'the transference of the negative' from the verb to the adjective, whereas the second is a negation in the absolute sense.⁸²

Plethon argues that negative propositions which deny the existence of particular individuals cannot be true simultaneously with affirmative propositions which assert their existence. The former are treated as universal not only by the common usage of Greek philosophers but by Aristotle himself. Plethon gives two examples from Aristotle:

⁷⁶ Legrand (1892), 31-3.

⁷⁸ *De Interpret.* 19^b20-2.

⁸⁰ Benakis, *op. cit.* 351. 27.

⁷⁷ Benakis, *op. cit.* 351. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 17^b26-34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 353. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.* 353. 34.

'There is no common limit where syllables join',⁸³ and 'There is no change apart from what changes'.⁸⁴ All such negative propositions occur in Aristotle only in a general sense: 'and that is enough on that subject'.⁸⁵ But Scholarios was to compel Plethon to return to it.

Plethon devotes greater space to the Emperor's second question, why he had argued (though not in *De Differentiis* nor in any other extant work) that the concept of mortality was a necessary part of the definition of man.⁸⁶ The Emperor had quoted Plethon as holding that it was mortality which distinguished man from the stars, which were also living bodies.⁸⁷ But this was a superfluous distinction, according to the Emperor, because the stars were called animate only in an equivocal sense: they differed from man in not possessing 'nutritive soul', whereas the concept of being animate in the case of man meant precisely this, that he possessed 'nutritive soul'. Plethon's reply therefore begins by defining the concept 'animate', which is wider than the other elements in the soul—'rational, sensitive, and nutritive'.⁸⁸ Just as animals are still animate and alive in spite of not being rational, so the stars can be animate and alive despite the absence of 'nutritive soul'.

Moreover, he continues, there is nothing strange about the stars appearing to have nutritive life, if it is assumed that there is only one basic matter in the whole universe and not two kinds of matter, 'even though Aristotle did not accept this, for the reasons which led him to make his innovation of a fifth element'.⁸⁹ To distinguish the matter of mortal and immortal bodies is to deny the existence of a single basic matter. Plethon thus resumes the attack on Aristotle's fifth element which he had originally made in *De Differentiis*.⁹⁰

If there is, as Plethon postulates, only one basic kind of matter, then it must be possible for all forms to be produced from it without alteration in itself. Apparent change consists either of addition or diminution of matter. This is clear in the case of mortal bodies, which change continuously. In dead bodies there is only diminution, in living bodies there is both addition and diminution. When such bodies are growing, addition exceeds diminution; when they are decaying, diminution exceeds addition, though the pace of change may be different in different cases. All matter must be capable of such change, but in the case of

⁸³ *Categories*, 4^b36-7.

⁸⁵ Benakis, *op. cit.* 353. 46.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 349. 20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 355. 61 (misprinted as 64).

⁸⁴ *Physics*, iii. 200^b32-3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 353-9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 353. 53.

⁹⁰ See Ch. XI, paras. 27-8, on pp. 201-2 above.

the stars the processes of addition and diminution are always in exact equilibrium, so that no change is apparent.⁹¹

In any case the immortality of the stars is not due to the matter of which they are composed, but to the 'perfection and strength of the Forms which God the Creator has conferred on them'.⁹² The increase and decrease of matter in the stars is not due to nutrition but to the addition and diminution caused by the Form itself, in the same way as if it had nutritive life. If stars are nevertheless regarded as animate, it follows that mortality cannot be superfluous to the definition of man.

On the other hand, it is wrong to put the rational and the mortal element of man into the same category of definition, as Alexander of Aphrodisias and his followers seem to have done. It is better to say that 'man is an immortal animal created to participate in a mortal nature'.⁹³ The rational element can be taken for granted, since there is no immortal animal which is not also rational. The right definition is one which links man's being most emphatically with his divine and immortal element.

Man is not a simple Form but a complex of two Forms, the divine and the animal. Beings which have the same Form have the same or similar function: thus, there are no significant differences of function between various animals—lions, cattle, wolves, deer. The same assumption can be made about Forms of a more divine character than man. Men, however, conduct their lives in many different ways, varying from the almost divine to the merely animal, and sometimes changing for better or worse from one kind of life to another. This could not happen if men were either wholly divine or wholly animal.⁹⁴

So man is compounded of two elements, the divine and the animal. When one is uppermost, he leads one kind of life; when the other, another kind. It is like two horsemen, one of whom can control his horse and the other cannot: a valid image of the human condition. Since man is so constituted by God 'for the sake of the harmony which prevails in the universe', the principal element in his being must be the divine element, and not the animal and mortal element as Alexander's followers held.⁹⁵

So ends Plethon's correspondence with the Emperor. The letters must have been written after the Emperor's return to Constantinople from Italy and before Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle* (which refers by

⁹¹ Benakis, *op. cit.* 355.

⁹² *Ibid.* 355. 84-5.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 357. 95.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 357-9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 359. 128-32.

implication to Plethon's letter):⁹⁶ that is to say, between early 1440 and 1444. During the same period Plethon had also to meet the arguments of a second critic, who was no less respectful than the Emperor but intellectually more formidable. This was his former pupil, Bessarion, who sent Plethon two letters. It is not clear where he was writing from, but as he called himself 'Cardinal'⁹⁷—a title which he received in December 1439—it is reasonable to suppose that he was in Italy, where he settled in 1441.

In the first letter Bessarion raises four questions, on which he is in doubt whether Plethon or the earlier Platonists had interpreted Plato correctly. The first is on self-subsistence; the second on the relation of communicability or participation; the third on the equivocality of being; the fourth on Fate and determinism.⁹⁸ Bessarion relies on the Neoplatonists for his interpretations: Proclus, Olympiodorus, Ammonius, Damascius, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Syrianus are all quoted, but not Plotinus. In his reply, conventionally entitled 'On the Creator of the heavens', Plethon refers additionally to Plotinus, Julian the Apostate, and the Chaldaean Oracles. But he emphasizes that the interpreters of Plato are not to be regarded as speaking with a single voice. He quotes a number of differences between them: for instance, on the existence of sacred daemons, and on the identification of the immediate creator of the universe.⁹⁹

Bessarion's first question expresses doubt about the self-subsistence of the soul and the separate minds or 'intelligible gods'.¹⁰⁰ Can anything be self-subsistent, he asks, except the First Cause, which alone is uncaused? Some statements by the Platonists, which he quotes, seem to imply that the soul is self-subsistent; otherwise it would not be immortal. Plethon's reply is that the soul is not unitary, as the First Cause is.¹⁰¹ It is a multiple or complex entity, partly produced by the creator and partly self-produced, just as it is partly self-moved and partly moved by thought and external circumstances. The same is true of the divine minds. Even the First Cause is not self-produced, but only self-subsistent. The eternity of the soul and the divine minds does not rest on self-movement or self-production but on the indivisibility of their most essential element and on their immediate production by an unmoved cause. This view, Plethon argues, is consistent with Proclus.

The second question concerns the relation of communicability or

⁹⁶ Benakis, *op. cit.* 333.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 455-8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 455.

⁹⁷ Mohler, *iii.* 455, 463.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 458-63.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 459-60.

participation between causes and effects.¹⁰² The interpreters of Plato, says Bessarion, seem to be uncertain whether either the First Cause or any other unit in the chain of causation communicates directly with what it produces and participates in it, or remains entirely apart and aloof. This appears to be a question about the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, though Bessarion does not use the word. He quotes examples of different theories on the point, and asks Plethon as 'the sole living leader of initiates (*μυσταγωγός*) and initiate of Plato's innermost circle (*ἐποπτεία*) to resolve the contradiction', being unable to do so himself.

Plethon replies that participation or communicability can have different senses.¹⁰³ There is first causal communication, in which the causal agent communicates something of itself to the product even while remaining entirely apart and aloof. There is also the communication of attachment or association, not involving causation. An example of the first is the relation of the separate minds to things in the world of sense; of the second, the relation of soul and body. Plethon does not elaborate the matter further.

The third question touches on the equivocality of being.¹⁰⁴ Bessarion quotes Proclus and Olympiodorus as showing that terms are not necessarily always applied to different things either equivocally or univocally. There is a third sense in which terms can be applied: this is in effect what Aristotle (though Bessarion does not quote him) called 'analogy'. Plethon's reply agrees with Bessarion by implication.¹⁰⁵ The term 'equivocal', he says, is itself used in two senses. Sometimes things which share a common name have nothing really in common; sometimes they have something in common, but it attaches less to one than to another, and does so only accidentally, not because of a common essence.

Plethon goes on to point out that things belonging to different genera may have a common name, as is the case between objects of sense and their corresponding Forms. Things which belong to the same genus may have a greater or less degree of being. An immortal animal has more being than a mortal one, and a rational animal more than an irrational one. But this does not mean that 'being' is attributed to them equivocally, any more than whiteness is attributed equivocally to the less white and the more white. On the other hand, deprivation and corruption and evil in general, which are debasements of being, are only said to 'be' in an equivocal sense.

¹⁰² Mohler, iii. 456.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 460.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 457.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 460-1.

The last question suggests that Plethon's strict determinism is inconsistent with Platonism, just as it is also (though Bessarion does not make the point) with Christianity.¹⁰⁶ Simplicius and Olympiodorus, he says, seem to him to 'make mincemeat' of fate and necessity; and they are supported by quotations from Ammonius, Damascius, and Plato himself. Their argument is in effect that without the freedom to choose, the soul would cease to be self-moved and would be deprived of its essence. Plethon's reply is a firm reassertion of his case against Aristotle.¹⁰⁷ Aristotle realized that Fate could not be eliminated so long as two axioms were both accepted: that every cause must necessarily and determinately produce its effect, and that every occurrence must have a cause. He therefore tried to repudiate the second axiom while retaining the first. Plethon then proceeds to argue that, so far as human conduct is concerned, this leads to unacceptable consequences.

If there are alternative courses open to man, wherein does the possibility of choice lie? The Aristotelians seem to place it in the human will. In that case either the human will acts at random, which reduces it to a nullity; or it is moved by an external impulse, which can only be by necessity. Aristotle in fact says that the will is moved by the intellect, which is itself subject to emotions. Neither the Stoics nor Plato in fact eliminate Fate. 'Lead me, O Zeus, thyself and Fate,' says Cleanthes, 'wherever I am bidden by you.'¹⁰⁸ Plato says that those who sin do so unwillingly; and that implies necessity. His myths also imply that when the soul chooses, it does so from habits formed in a previous life, which also implies a chain of necessary causal connection.¹⁰⁹

To eliminate Fate would also eliminate God's foreknowledge of events. This cannot be evaded by arguing that God has definite foreknowledge of things that are indefinite, for 'indefinite' is not a relative term like 'half' or 'double'. Knowledge implies a precise thing known. God knows things by doing them, and what he knows and does cannot be indefinite. Further, he can only know and do what is good, for bad things are mere deviations from being and do not require a cause. So determinism cannot be used to involve God in causing evil. 'Such is our contribution to your problems,' Plethon concludes: 'enough for such a man as you.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 457-8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 461-3.

¹⁰⁸ Cleanthes in *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim (Leipzig 1903), i. 118, fr. 527.

¹⁰⁹ Mohler, iii. 462.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 463.

In a further letter, tacitly accepting Plethon's parting compliment, Bessarion expressed himself satisfied with his old teacher's explanations, particularly with regard to the equivocality of being and Fate.¹¹¹ He referred to other points which puzzled him, such as the mathematical formulae in the eighth book of Plato's *Republic* and the tenth book of Plato's *Laws*. He also asked for clarification of certain points in Plethon's astronomical scheme. The latter reference is to an unpublished work which is not easily identified. Two astronomical manuscripts by Plethon are recorded: *A Method of Fixing the Sun, Moon, and Period of the Planets by Rules Established by Himself*; and *Ordering of Months and Years and Enumeration of Days*.¹¹²

The second work may be identical with a similarly entitled section of the *Book of Laws*, which forms the last part of book iii, ch. 36. Bessarion's questions seem to be relevant in part to that chapter, arising as they do from three problems: on which day of which month the old year ends and the new year begins; whether the current year is, on Plethon's scheme, one of twelve months or one with an intercalary thirteenth month; and whether the number of years is calculated from the creation of the world or from Alexander. In fact, chronology and the calendar have as much to do with the questions as astronomy. They are subjects to which Plethon returned in the *Book of Laws* (on which he was already engaged); and there is also extant an unpublished manuscript entitled *Chronological Table from Nabonassar to the Emperor Michael Palaiologos*.¹¹³

Plethon's reply to Bessarion gives no clear indication about the precise work which Bessarion had before him.¹¹⁴ He begins with some supplementary points in answer to Bessarion's earlier letter. First, on equivocality, he advises Bessarion not to be confused by the fact that man in this world and man as an intelligible Form are both called Man; 'for it does not follow from the fact that the dog-fish and the land dog are both called dogs equivocally, that they are both called animals only in an equivocal sense'. Secondly, on Fate he supplies two quotations from Plato: one on the 'necessity of the soul' from the *Epinomis* (a work which is not certainly by Plato, though Platonic in character);¹¹⁵ and one from *Cratylus*, in which Plato says that 'desire is stronger than necessity'.¹¹⁶ Plethon asks: 'How could anything that is not necessary be stronger than necessity?'

¹¹¹ Mohler, iii. 463-5.

¹¹³ Ibid. 782 n. (t).

¹¹⁵ *Epinomis*, 982 B.

¹¹² PG 160, 782 n. (t); 785-6, para. 21.

¹¹⁴ Mohler, iii. 465-8.

¹¹⁶ *Cratylus*, 403 C.

He concludes by dealing briefly with Bessarion's other two points. First, he is unable to understand Plato's mathematical formulae himself. He has always avoided the problem, and so did Demetrios Kydones when he asked him, saying that they were simply part of Plato's myth-making.¹¹⁷ Secondly, he explains how to calculate the intercalary month and sends the corrected figures which Bessarion requested.¹¹⁸ But he does not directly answer Bessarion's questions on his own calendar.

Plethon's third critic was as formidable as Bessarion intellectually, but far less respectful. This was George Scholarios, who had resumed his place at the imperial court after his return from Italy. He did not see a copy of *De Differentiis* until about 1443, by his own account, though of course he well knew the substance of Plethon's arguments in Florence. In 1443-4 he set about composing his *Defence of Aristotle* in reply. During the same years he was much troubled by the aftermath of the Council of Union. He found himself under reproach from Mark Eugenikos, who wrote him a critical letter in 1440 or 1441.¹¹⁹ He was also becoming doubtful about his standing with the Emperor.¹²⁰

At the centre of Scholarios' problems was his attitude towards the Union. It is not certain for what error Eugenikos was reproaching him. Although it was once assumed to have been for supporting the Union, this may not necessarily have been the case. An alternative suggestion is that it was for remaining in the Emperor's service instead of retiring to a monastery, as was his professed wish. His uncertainty about the Emperor's attitude towards him may have been due to Scholarios' growing hostility to the Union. In 1444-5 he took the leading part in the debate at Constantinople, in the presence of the Emperor, with the Latin delegation led by the Bishop of Cortona, Bartolomeo Lapacci. Whatever doubts there could have been about Scholarios' earlier position on the Union, there were none now. The leadership of the anti-Unionist cause had been entrusted to him by Mark Eugenikos on his death-bed, and Scholarios did not fail him.¹²¹

Shortly before Eugenikos' death, which is most probably dated on 23 June 1444, Scholarios was able to send him a copy of the *Defence of Aristotle*.¹²² No one else had been shown a copy, least of all Plethon.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Mohler, iii. 467. 15-22.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 467-8.

¹¹⁹ Zisis, 148-51.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 164, 172-3.

¹²¹ Ibid. 165-6.

¹²² Scholarios, iv. 116-18.

¹²³ PG 160, 979-80 D.

The choice of Eugenikos as the first recipient was a natural one. He had a special position in relation to both Plethon and Scholarios. He had been a pupil of Plethon, and although he had never had Scholarios as a pupil in the strict sense, Scholarios had always looked up to him as his spiritual guide. By choosing him on this occasion, Scholarios showed his awareness that the controversy between himself and Plethon had a theological as well as a philosophical character.

Scholarios saw *De Differentiis* as an attack on Orthodoxy. To the title of his own essay ('Response to the problems of Plethon on Aristotle') he added in his own hand, on the manuscript preserved in a monastery on Mount Athos, the words: 'and against Hellenes or Polytheists'.¹²⁴ The term 'Hellene' was one which Plethon used readily of himself, but to the staunchly Orthodox Scholarios it was equivalent to 'pagan'.¹²⁵ In criticizing *De Differentiis* he was therefore attacking paganism as well as defending Aristotle. It is not surprising that he should have wished to have Mark Eugenikos, as Plethon's former pupil, express his approval before doing so.

The *Defence of Aristotle* is a very long treatise, running to nearly 50,000 words in Greek, and at least eight times as long as *De Differentiis*. A complete translation of the text would be tedious and unnecessary, but a summary will help to give the substance and flavour of the conflict between Plethon and Scholarios. Without such a summary, Plethon's *Reply*, which is essential to an understanding of his own philosophy, would be unintelligible.

The following summary is designed to identify the points which Scholarios picked out from *De Differentiis* and those to which Plethon addressed himself in reply. They are indicated by references back to Chapter XI and forward to Chapter XV respectively. Thus, the figures (XI. 1, 2, 3, etc.) refer to paragraphs in the translation of *De Differentiis*, and (XV. 1, 2, 3, etc.) to paragraphs in Plethon's *Reply*. There are also some points which Plethon made in his letters to the Emperor and Bessarion, which are made again at greater length in his *Reply*.

Two personal points may be added in conclusion. First, Scholarios had addressed his work to the Despot Constantine, who was about to take up his post at Mistra. So it should not have been difficult for Plethon to have access to a copy. But it appears that several years passed before he saw the work, and then only in a defective form, which was obtained clandestinely for him by his admirer and would-

¹²⁴ Masai (1956), 35 n. 3; Scholarios, iv. 1.

¹²⁵ Scholarios, iii. 253. 4-5.

be pupil, Michael Apostoles.¹²⁶ Secondly, Scholarios invariably used the name Plethon rather than Gemistos, except at two points in his final paragraph, as well as in the covering letter to Mark Eugenikos.¹²⁷ In those places he referred to Gemistos. This makes it clear, despite Scholarios' pretence to the contrary, that he had no doubt about the identity of Plethon. The name cannot be regarded as a pseudonym intended to conceal the identity of the author, which it never for a moment did.

¹²⁶ PG 160, 981 A; Alexandre, 370.

¹²⁷ Scholarios, iv. 116. 11-19; 117. 8.

XIII

SCHOLARIOS' DEFENCE OF ARISTOTLE

SCHOLARIOS begins with a complaint and a note of aggression. 'The book containing blasphemies against Aristotle only recently came into my hands', he writes to the Despot Constantine, three or four years after Plethon's *De Differentiis* was written.¹ With the word 'blasphemies' (even if taken only in the classical sense of 'slanders'), he declares his work to be polemical, which it is. But the implication that Plethon had been withholding *De Differentiis* from him is scarcely justified. Plethon's essay had not been directed personally against Scholarios. It was written for the benefit of the Italian humanists, not for Greek intellectuals who would already be familiar with both Plato and Aristotle. Plethon was able to point out in his *Reply* that he had sent Scholarios a copy as soon as he was asked for it, whereas he had great difficulty in obtaining a copy of Scholarios' own treatise.² (XV. 1.)

The note of personal antagonism was thus first sounded by Scholarios. But although Plethon had not yet attacked Scholarios personally, he had clearly implied that the Aristotelians were either fools or heretics. Scholarios resented it, especially as he already suspected Plethon of heresy in his turn.³ He had also heard a recent rumour that Plethon intended to attack him, even if he had not yet done so.⁴ All this helps to account for the note of anger in Scholarios' introduction. But he hastened to add that he held Plethon 'in high regard among the Hellenes', and did not deny him the right to criticize Aristotle.⁵ Aristotle's reputation was too high to be damaged, but no one before had attacked his religion so violently.

(XI. 1-2.) After this mildly apologetic digression, Scholarios returns to the attack. Plethon was wrong in saying that the earlier Greeks preferred Plato to Aristotle. Most of them preferred Aristotle, or put them on the same level, arguing that their differences were purely verbal. (XV. 2.) Now Plethon, 'who had never before written anything impor-

¹ Scholarios, iv. 1. 8. For the date, see Alexandre, p. xxxvi, and Introduction to Scholarios iv, pp. iv-v.

² PG 160, 980 D-1 A.

⁴ Ibid. 6. 16-17.

³ Scholarios, iv. 114.

⁵ Ibid. 2. 5-6; 20-2.

tant on philosophy, has produced these blasphemies against Aristotle, like the mountain producing a mouse, as the saying is'.⁶ It seems that Scholarios could not make up his mind whether *De Differentiis* was a monstrosity or a triviality. The same ambivalence marks the following passage, in which he denounces the Platonists and extols the Aristotelians, including those of both the West and the East.

'We know who were the Platonists who were recently worsted in Italy, for whose benefit Plethon says he undertook his essay', Scholarios writes. 'Many of us saw them in his company there—men who know as much about philosophy as Plethon knows about dancing.'⁷ He dismisses them as purely literary scholars, interested in style rather than content. 'But those in the West who have really studied philosophical questions do not share the Platonists' views. Probably they are more numerous: I myself met not a few of them.'⁸ All these points were to be sharply repudiated by Plethon in his *Reply*. (XV. 3-4.)

Plethon has tried, Scholarios continues, to undermine Aristotle's credit by attacking Averroes.⁹ But the Latins' respect for Aristotle does not rest only on Averroes. Plethon also misrepresents Averroes in saying that he held the human mind to be mortal, for the Latins and Jews say that he did not. (XV. 5.) In any case it is irrelevant to bring Averroes into the argument. The point is that 'I do not prefer Aristotle to Plato nor Plato to Aristotle, but I rate them equally highly in the chorus of philosophers.' Both made mistakes, 'because the light of truth had not yet dawned in men's souls'.¹⁰ But of the two, tested by their approximation to revealed truth, Aristotle was closer to Christianity than Plato. (XV. 6.) Without Aristotle, men would never have had natural philosophy, nor even ethics except to the limited extent that they could derive benefit from Plato.¹¹ (XV. 7.)

There follow some further preliminary remarks of a general character. Scholarios is defending himself as well as Aristotle. All genuine philosophers will support 'myself and Aristotle'.¹² He will follow Plethon's sequence of argument, though adding some points and omitting others. He will submit to the judgement of his addressee, the Despot Constantine; but that judgement must be guided not by those who seek notoriety by publishing unorthodox doctrines, but 'by Aristotle himself and Plato and the philosophers who now punctiliously follow them'. That category, he says, includes many in the West. It

⁶ Ibid. 3. 19-20.

⁷ Ibid. 4. 2-6.

⁸ Ibid. 4. 11-14.

⁹ Ibid. 4. 16-25.

¹⁰ Ibid. 4. 26-32.

¹¹ Ibid. 5. 11-13.

¹² Ibid. 6. 36.

also includes Constantine, who is himself a better philosopher than Plethon. The latter in fact does not even know Plato particularly well, and is far from being the first or ablest critic of Aristotle.¹³ (There is no evidence of the response of the Despot Constantine to Scholarios' testimonial.)

Aristotle is sometimes obscure, Scholarios admits, but that is the mark of a true philosopher. He would have become clear if one had actually heard him, or heard one of his followers 'expounding his veiled meaning'; whereas Plato spoke in 'metaphors and generalities', which could be variously interpreted. Aristotle's obscurity is that of a philosopher; Plato's highly coloured language is that of a poet, 'not to say some lower occupation'.¹⁴ (XV. 8.) Plethon, he suspects, will merely deliver 'another attack on Aristotle' in reply, but his failure to answer reasoned argument will condemn him in advance.¹⁵ The problems he raises will be resolved by Scholarios with the test of truth. 'No one that I know of among the Hellenes, either in antiquity or in my own time,' he concludes, 'has ever devoted so much meticulous study to Aristotle and to the truth as I have.'¹⁶ Thus ends Scholarios' introduction.

He proceeds to the substance of his argument, which is divided into two parts of roughly equal length. But they deal with unequal proportions of Plethon's text. Book i deals with topics which occupy less than a quarter of *De Differentiis*, down to Plethon's criticism of Aristotle's supposed analogies between universal and matter, particular and form.¹⁷ Book ii deals with every other topic from that point on, except for the major section on the Theory of Forms, which occupies more than one-third of *De Differentiis* but is barely mentioned by Scholarios.

These disparities illustrate the difference in philosophical interests between Plethon and Scholarios. To Plethon, the most important topic was the Theory of Forms, which was to be the basis of his own neo-pagan mythology. To Scholarios, the most important topic was Plethon's attack on Aristotle for 'inclining towards atheism' because he did not recognize the creation of the universe by God. This topic takes up only three paragraphs of *De Differentiis* (Chapter XI, paras. 3-5), but more than half of Scholarios' Book i.¹⁸

¹³ Scholarios, iv. 7. 22-8. 3.

¹⁴ Ibid. 8. 13-28.

¹⁵ Ibid. 9. 6-11.

¹⁶ Ibid. 10. 8-10.

¹⁷ Ibid. 67. 30. The termination of Book i corresponds with: (1) the end of para. V in PG 160, 897 c; (2) Lagarde, 325. 34; (3) the end of para. 13 of Chapter XI on p. 197 above.

¹⁸ Lagarde, 321. 23-323. 4; Scholarios, iv. 10. 17-43. 38.

(XI. 3-5.) Scholarios' thesis on the creation of the universe is two-fold. Neither Plato nor Aristotle could be expected to grasp the full truth as revealed through Christianity. But Plato is further from that truth, and Aristotle is nearer to it, than Plethon allows. Round these two points Scholarios elaborates a long succession of arguments, turning largely on minutiae of verbal interpretation. He gives the impression of thinking aloud rather than organizing his thoughts in a coherent sequence. But he cannot rebut Plethon's basic point that Aristotle nowhere asserts, in so many words, that God created the world. At best he can only argue that Aristotle implies it, which is doubtful; and that even Plato does not assert it in a sense consonant with Christian theology, which is perhaps true.

Aristotle says only that God moves the world, which is eternal, and that God is the 'final cause' of movement and change. (XV. 9.) Plethon argues that Aristotle does not therefore believe God to be the creator of the universe. Scholarios replies that Plethon fails to prove that Aristotle's God *only* moves the world in space, without having made or produced it.¹⁹ (Much is to be made by Scholarios of the distinction between to make and to produce, on the one hand, and to create, on the other.) Plethon fails also to show that by making God only the final cause of movement and change in the universe, Aristotle is denying that he is the final cause of its existence as well.²⁰

It is true, Scholarios admits, that Aristotle presumes the universe to be eternal, but Plethon 'fails to prove that if there is no creation of the universe, there is no productive cause of it either'.²¹ Plethon suggests that 'some Christians' (which Scholarios takes to include himself) try to harmonize Aristotle with Christianity by attributing this doctrine to Moses. From this it would follow that if Aristotle was wrong, so were those Christians. (XV. 10.) But Scholarios does not accept this argument. He asserts the orthodox view that the creation of the universe occurred at a particular moment in time. We hold this view, he says, 'not because a beginning in time is presupposed by causal generation, but because this is what Holy Scripture teaches us, and nothing impossible follows from it; for it is not necessary that if the cause is eternal, the consequence of it is also eternal'.²²

A digression follows. Scholarios thinks it possible that Plato learned part of his doctrine of the creation from Moses, for no Greek

¹⁹ Scholarios, iv. 10. 27-9.

²⁰ Ibid. 10. 33-5.

²¹ Ibid. 11. 11-12.

²² Ibid. 11. 13-30. There is no such reference to Moses in *De Differentiis*, but Plethon takes up Scholarios' point in his *Reply*.

philosopher before him had any conception of 'the immaterial and immovable first principle of existing things'.²³ Previous conceptions were entirely materialistic. Scholarios goes on to consider Plato's debt to past teachers, and especially to Moses. Scholarios' acknowledgment of an alleged debt of Plato to Moses, which was quite fictitious but common among Greek theologians, is introduced to justify his claim that he was not prejudiced against Plato.

Earlier philosophers, he says, like Anaxagoras and Pythagoras, had learned much from the Egyptians and Jews. Plato also learned something of Moses' doctrines when he visited Egypt, but unfortunately he mixed up with it a lot of nonsense from the pagan Greek poets.²⁴ Where Plato is right, he owes it to Moses: for example, on the creation of the universe and the immortality of the soul. But he was apt to confuse what he learned from Moses with what he picked up from 'certain of the poets among the Hellenes, whom they call inspired': for example, that the whole universe was created out of one and the same matter, not a distinct matter for the heavens and another for things subject to generation and decay.²⁵ Also, he did not indicate who were the original discoverers of his theories, making them all out to be his own. Consequently Aristotle, although treating Plato with respect as his teacher, was obliged to establish his own philosophy on a new and more scientific basis.

Plato, says Scholarios, 'confused all the disciplines'. It was left to Aristotle to distinguish them. He also tore away the 'veil of myth' behind which Plato hid the 'divine truth'. He distinguished 'philosophy, like physics and mathematics, from poetry and divine possession'. Plethon ought to appreciate this, 'since he himself is reputed to deprecate inspirations and revelations, and to argue in another work that truth is only to be found by human reason through philosophy'.²⁶ (XV. 11.)

Aristotle's approach to philosophy may be less attractive than Plato's, he argues, but its rigorous distinction of different disciplines was a major advance of which Plato was incapable. It led Aristotle to conclude that 'heaven and time and movement are eternal; and he proved it in many ways, and criticized Plato for suggesting that the world is created, believing it himself to be uncreated'.²⁷ These words seem to concede a major part of Plethon's case. But Scholarios goes on to find an error in Plato and a concealed meaning in Aristotle.

²³ Scholarios, iv. 11. 33-4.

²⁵ Ibid. 14. 12-16.

²⁶ Ibid. 16. 30-5.

²⁴ Ibid. iv. 12. 3 ff.

²⁷ Ibid. 18. 19-22.

Plato argued that the world is not only created but also indestructible; or at least 'by nature destructible, though never to be destroyed'.²⁸ But if it is created, it cannot be indestructible: such is Plato's error. Aristotle, on the other hand, did not mean that the material universe is uncreated in the sense that it has no productive cause, or that it is self-generated. He meant that matter does not come into existence like things subject to generation and destruction, which pass through stages in the process: it achieves its full being all at once.²⁹

'So Aristotle does not conclude simply that indestructible things had no beginning, but that they had no beginning through generation—that is to say, physical change, by which things subject to generation and destruction come into being, as Plato appeared to say.'³⁰ Plato, in fact, according to Scholarios, is vague about these matters. Aristotle said in his *Topics* that he could find nothing definite about the eternity of the universe in Plato's teaching,³¹ though later Platonists argued that he did regard the universe as causally created, but not in time. (XV. 12.) It would take a prophet, however, to deduce this meaning from Plato's words, whereas 'for Aristotle's views on eternity there is no need of a prophet'.³²

Scholarios at once tacitly recognizes that the clarity of Aristotle's view on eternity does not make it consistent with Christianity, but rather the contrary. So he returns to his apologia. Not having the benefit of divine inspiration, Aristotle could not invariably be right. Christians believe that the world began in time, but they owe this belief to the inspiration of God, not to the wisdom or teaching of men.³³ God exercises his power over the human soul by inspiration. Aristotle himself recognizes the existence of such a power when he says 'it is reasonable to suppose that there are so many immovable substances; for the assertion of necessity can be left to more powerful minds'³⁴—by which he means 'a necessity greater than can be inferred from appearances, that is, a holy and revealed necessity'. (XV. 13.) God revealed this power through Moses, and later through Christ; but not, of course, through Plato or Aristotle.³⁵

²⁸ Ibid. 18. 30-1, referring to *Timaeus* 41 B.

²⁹ Scholarios, iv. 19. 6-13.

³⁰ Ibid. 19. 35-7.

³¹ Ibid. 20. 6-10, probably referring to *Topics* i. 104^b14-17: 'Problems occur . . . where, because the questions are so vast, we have no argument to offer, thinking it difficult to assign a reason, for example, whether the universe is eternal or not.' No specific reference to Plato occurs in this context.

³² Scholarios, iv. 20. 15-20.

³³ Ibid. 20. 29 ff.

³⁴ *Met.* xii. 1074^a15-18.

³⁵ Scholarios, iv. 22. 10-16.

Aristotle's view, however, is 'not altogether contrary to the Christian doctrine, but differs from it only in his supposition that movement existed always; for according to the Christian faith, nothing can exist always except God alone'.³⁶ That word 'always' is all that separates Aristotle from Christianity. 'Without it, his definition of eternity would be acceptable: it would be accepted even according to our faith that some things are in this sense eternal.'³⁷ He nowhere argues, as Plethon accuses him of doing, that causal creation must necessarily entail creation in time. On the contrary, Scholarios quotes a number of passages from the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, and elsewhere which imply the opposite.

The general inference which Scholarios draws from these passages is that Aristotle conceived of God as the cause of the existence of the universe, though not in the sense of creation in time.³⁸ 'So nothing could be clearer than these considerations to demonstrate that Aristotle not only did not incline to atheism but also uniquely upheld the most excellent and sublime doctrines.'³⁹ In these paragraphs Scholarios exposed himself to a number of verbal quibbles, which Plethon exploited in his *Reply*. At this point it is only necessary to identify the vulnerable phrases.

First, Scholarios quotes passages from the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* to show that Aristotle did recognize that eternal things could have causes. The example from the *Physics* concerned the properties of a triangle, which Plethon dismissed as irrelevant; the example from the *Metaphysics* argued that 'the deity serves as a cause to the world not only of eternal motion but also of existence'.⁴⁰ (Here Plethon's retort turns on the distinction between a 'cause to' something and a 'cause of' something: XV. 14.) Secondly, Scholarios quotes Aristotle as arguing that all men who believe in the gods 'assign the uppermost heaven to the deity, thus conjoining the immortal to the immortal',⁴¹ which Scholarios construes as meaning that the gods are the source of the immortality of heaven. (But according to Plethon, the word 'conjoining' cannot have this sense: XV. 15.) Thirdly, Scholarios attributes to Aristotle the view that God is the first principle (*ἀρχή*) of the universe,⁴² which he takes to mean the creator. (But the word *ἀρχή* is rich in meanings, and Plethon construes it differently: XV. 16.)

³⁶ Scholarios, iv. 23. 2-5.

³⁷ Ibid. 23. 18-20.

³⁸ Ibid. 24. 12 ff.

³⁹ Ibid. 27. 13-15.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 25. 32-26. 5, based on *Physics*, viii. 252^a34-252^b5; and *Met.* ii. 993^b26-31.

⁴¹ Scholarios, iv. 26. 23 ff., based on *De Caelo*, i. 270^b5-9.

⁴² Scholarios, iv. 27. 24 ff., based on *Met.* i. 983^a8-9.

The next example of linguistic disagreement is more fundamental. Scholarios tries to establish that 'to move' is the same as 'to make'. (XV. 17.) The suggestion follows from the fact that in Greek the same word (*κίνησις*) served for both movement and change. The two verbs which Scholarios seeks to identify could be translated as 'to make something happen' and 'to make something be'. So 'to move something' means not only 'to make something move' but also 'to make something change', and that in turn includes 'to make something change from non-existence to existence', or in Aristotelian language, from potentiality to actuality; and that means 'to make or create something'.⁴³

Thus, according to Scholarios, Aristotle regards the source of movement as being also the source of creation. Plato and Aristotle do not disagree, he says, in holding that what moves the universe is 'a single animate being', and this is also the cause of the unity of all things. Aristotle identifies it with God, Plato with the Forms. (It would be more accurate to say that Plato identifies it with the ultimate Form, the Good.) 'But how', asks Scholarios, 'can the Forms be responsible for the unity of things if that unity is due to that which causes motion, while the Forms have no occasion to be responsible for motion?'⁴⁴ These arguments were to provoke a polemical retort from Plethon. (XV. 18.)

Further variants follow of Scholarios' theme that to make something move and to make it exist are indistinguishable. Aristotle believes, he says, that the motive cause is the source of change in the same sense as the father is of his son or the designer of his product.⁴⁵ 'Thus in two examples he touched in a general way on the two principles of motion, from which everything comes into existence—the intention in the designer and nature in the father. So what he is saying is that the motive cause is not only the cause of motion but is also creative. . . .'⁴⁶

What, then, is this motive cause? 'It is hard to believe that, while Aristotle regards the heavenly bodies as responsible not only for the movement of other things but also for their existence—the unchanging for the changing—yet he regards that which moves the heavenly bodies as responsible only for their movement.' (XV. 19.) Nor can it happen

⁴³ Scholarios, iv. 28. 8 ff.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 28. 27-29. 5. Aristotle says only that 'some speak of the Forms as causes', without naming Plato: *Met.* vii. 1033^b26-7.

⁴⁵ Scholarios, iv. 29. 13 ff.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 30. 11-15.

by mere chance, or, in Aristotle's phrase, 'spontaneously' (*ἀπὸ ταῦτομάτου*). (XV. 20.) It must be something eternal, incorporeal, and immovable. So the First Mover can only be God. 'So God is the creative cause of heaven, as well as the final and exemplary cause, and through heaven of all being: thus Aristotle regards God as the creator of the whole universe.'⁴⁷

Scholarios goes even further: one can even find in Aristotle a consistency with Christian revelation through the Word of God and the Will of the Holy Spirit. 'These things must be added beyond Aristotle, being things of the holy faith, but also on behalf of Aristotle, in that he gives us many clues to this truth; and I consider that Plato does so also.'⁴⁸ But in contrast to Plato, Aristotle does not think that God used the Forms as models in creating the universe, 'for he used himself as a model and did not refer to any external Forms'.⁴⁹

Scholarios argues that to suppose that God used models external to himself is to depreciate him, even in comparison with human craftsmen; for craftsmen make things superior to their models, whereas the objects of sense are inferior to the Forms. 'This we have merely touched on superficially in passing', adds Scholarios.⁵⁰ It is an incidental rebuttal of Plethon's charge that Aristotle rather than Plato 'inclined towards atheism'.

After this digression, Scholarios turns from the creation of the physical universe to the introduction of mind into it. Mind is introduced into the universe, according to Aristotle, by the divine mind. The divine mind is similar to, but not identical with, the minds which it makes or creates.⁵¹ Scholarios even calls it a Form in the Platonic sense: 'the altogether immaterial, unmoved and first of all Forms', which 'is the cause of the movement or the making of all other Forms, and moves them to its own likeness and implants it in them all, in some more perfectly, in others less perfectly'.⁵²

Here Scholarios seems to be paraphrasing Aristotle in the light of his own interpretation, but the paraphrase enables him to conclude: 'so, according to Aristotle, God is the efficient and formal and final cause of all things'.⁵³ Aristotle's God is thus not simply the final cause, as Plethon had interpreted Aristotle's view, but also the efficient cause. Between these two causes, Scholarios says, 'there is a mutual

⁴⁷ Scholarios, iv. 30. 17-31. 28.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 32. 33-4.

⁵² Ibid. 34. 3-7.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 33. 24.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 32. 19-22.

⁵¹ Ibid. 33. 31-2.

⁵³ Ibid. 34. 15-16.

correspondence', in that although they are logically separable, the efficient cause, which makes or creates something, 'acts for an end' (which is the final cause).⁵⁴

The identification of the two verbs which mean respectively 'to make or create' and 'to move or change' continues to be crucial to Scholarios' argument. If Aristotle had thought that God was only the final cause, he would not have called him the first principle or origin (*ἀρχή*): 'so he knew God to be both the *ἀρχή*, meaning the creative and motive cause, and also the end'.⁵⁵ He then examines the nature of the first principle, to show that it can only be identified with God. It has to be 'an intelligible substance, immaterial and unmoved'. If it were eliminated from the universe, order would also be eliminated; and if order were eliminated, generation would be also.⁵⁶ 'Thus it is proved that the first principle, which Aristotle postulates as mental and immaterial, is the principle of order in all existing things, and of generation in those which come into existence, and of all the heavenly bodies.'⁵⁷ If it did not exist, they would not exist either. (XV. 21.)

Aristotle rejects the view (which he attributes to Plato) that number is the first principle, followed by magnitudes and then by objects of sense, since that would make the universe incoherent. Numbers and magnitudes are purely contingent and their principles can only be contingent.⁵⁸ The universe, on the other hand, 'is directed in the best possible way by one lord and ruler, who is the first mover and maker, the first in thought and thinking, the first to be desired and the first in goodness; and that has been shown to be God'.⁵⁹ Scholarios insists that these are Aristotle's actual views, not simply those which he thinks Aristotle ought to have held.⁶⁰

It is not necessary to assume that Aristotle did declare God to be the creator (*δημιουργός*) in some lost work, though 'it could be said that in the lost passages of the *Metaphysics* something broader and clearer was said about the first principle; for some say, and it is probable, that many passages have been lost'.⁶¹ (XV. 22.) It is enough, however, to explain his omission of this actual word on the ground that the verb derived from it normally means to make or improve something out of what already exists.⁶² St Augustine himself makes this point. Other Church Fathers also did not speak of God as

⁵⁴ Ibid. 34. 19-27.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 37. 9-12.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 35. 39-36. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 35. 8-11.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 37. 15-24.

⁶¹ Ibid. 38. 1-3.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 36. 17 ff.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 37. 30-2.

⁶² Ibid. 38. 9 ff.

the creator (*δημιουργός*) but as the maker (*ποιητής*). Moses himself said: 'In the beginning God *made* heaven and earth.'⁶³ And to make is the verb which Scholarios has already identified with to move.

The closing passage of this section presents a series of defensive arguments. Scholarios tacitly recognizes that it is possible to regard Aristotle as having left himself open to misinterpretation, at least by omission or obscurity. But only someone so malicious as Plethon would so misinterpret him. 'Aristotle would indeed have been childish, as Plethon insultingly implies, if he were contradicting Plato's doctrine on the deity, when he had himself interspersed his own works with the same doctrine, far more clearly and precisely, as has been sufficiently proved.'⁶⁴ In each case that Scholarios examines, he finds that Plethon's imputation of error is due to the same cause: Plethon has read an excess of meaning into what Aristotle did *not* say rather than trying to understand what he said.

'It would be ridiculous to condemn Aristotle not on account of what he said but on account of what he did not say at all, making neither an affirmative nor a negative statement.'⁶⁵ (XV. 23.) The first example is the theory of the creation of the universe. Here Aristotle's silence is itself convincing. He had, after all, presented a formidable battery of arguments against the theory of Forms. If he had also disagreed with Plato about the creation of the universe, he would have done the same thing in that case too; and even more so, 'especially as he knew that this theory was the special pride of Plato'.⁶⁶ In effect Aristotle is being criticized merely for failing to use one particular word: creator. This is as little justified as to criticize Moses for saying that in the beginning God 'made' instead of 'created' the world.

Next Scholarios deals with Plethon's argument that by calling God only the end to which the universe moves, Aristotle implies that he is not the origin or first principle by which the universe is created. Aristotle does not use the word 'end' of God in this limited sense. If he did, it would follow that the universe, having no beginning, was self-generated: it would itself be the first principle or source of its own being, which is impossible.⁶⁷

In addition, it is clear that Aristotle conceives the first principle as 'the supreme desirable good' and as 'mind concentrating its thought solely upon itself'. What else can this be but God? It is absurd to imagine that Aristotle thought the end and the first principle were

⁶³ Scholarios, iv. 38. 31-7.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 38. 38-39. 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 39. 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 39. 5-9.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 39. 26-40. 12.

different. 'It is clear that he never meant that God is only the end of movement in the universe and not of its existence.'⁶⁸

The next argument turns on Aristotle's remark, quoted by Plethon, that 'it is absurd, indeed an impossibility, to suppose the generation of eternal entities'.⁶⁹ Plethon applied this argument to the universe: if it were eternal, then according to Aristotle it could not have been generated in time, and therefore it could have had no creator. But Aristotle's argument was only directed at the Pythagoreans, who believed that numbers had been generated in time, some earlier than others.⁷⁰ He was merely criticizing them for that absurdity. (XV. 24.) Obviously the notion of causality must have a different sense in relation to abstract entities like numbers, to perishable objects of sense, and to eternal heavenly bodies. Scholarios concludes that 'Plethon will in the end either resolve these points in favour of Aristotle, however reluctantly, or give up and admit himself defeated by those who can resolve them.'⁷¹

So far the *Defence of Aristotle* has spent some fifteen thousand words on three paragraphs of *De Differentiis* (paras. 3-5 of Chapter XI) which themselves amount to less than five hundred words. The disproportion emphasizes the overwhelming importance in Scholarios' mind of the attack on Aristotle's right to be regarded as a forerunner of Christianity. Plethon also recognized that the crucial area of dispute between himself and Scholarios lay in those paragraphs of *De Differentiis* which Scholarios attacks at such length. When he came to prepare his *Reply to the Defence of Aristotle*, he picked out thirty-three points on which to make specific retorts; and twenty-four of the thirty-three are cited from the same section of the *Defence* which has so far been analysed.

Thus the subject of the creation of the universe grew from occupying less than one-tenth of *De Differentiis* to more than a quarter of the *Defence of Aristotle* and finally to nearly three-quarters of Plethon's *Reply*. The remainder of the *Defence* can therefore be more briefly considered.

(XI. 6.) Scholarios turns to Plethon's argument about Aristotle's claim to have discovered the equivocal way in which the word 'being' is

⁶⁸ Ibid. 41. 30-1.

⁶⁹ *Met.* xiv. 1091^a12-13, quoted by Plethon in Ch. XI, para. 4 on p. 193 above (Lagarde, 322. 11-12).

⁷⁰ Scholarios, iv. 42. 5 ff.

⁷¹ Ibid. 43. 35-7.

used. (XV. 25.) Plethon says there is no difficulty in applying the same predicate to different kinds of subjects in a univocal sense. Scholarios replies that Aristotle in fact devised a third kind of predication which is neither univocal nor equivocal but analogical, and this is the case with 'being'.⁷² He gives examples of all three kinds. An example of analogical predication is the word 'medical' as applied either to a book or to an instrument.⁷³ Similarly with the word 'being' itself. 'The logical character of things corresponds to the character of their being.'⁷⁴

Thus, substance and accident have being in the same sense, but substance is prior to accident, so the word 'being' cannot be applied to them univocally. On the other hand, since they have a common logical character, the word 'being' as applied to them is also not equivocal. Therefore Aristotle was right to call it analogical.⁷⁵ There follow arguments *ad hominem* to show that Plethon has misunderstood him.

First, according to Aristotle, God is the first principle or point of origin to which all things must be referred and in which they all share. This is their unifying principle: they do not need to share another single common character, namely 'being', in a univocal sense. 'If the first cause of all things is sufficient, once and for all, to produce everything that shares with it the common characteristic of having unlimited potentiality, then what need is there of common being?'⁷⁶ It was the view of Aristotle, as of all right-minded people, that it was 'impossible to postulate being as a kind of formal cause of beings, on the assumption that being is a genus in itself, univocal and separate from particular beings, as the Platonists suppose'.⁷⁷ For Aristotle being is not a genus at all (though he occasionally so calls it in an analogical sense); and being cannot be separated from particular beings.

Plethon is incapable of understanding Aristotle's distinction of the univocal, equivocal, and analogical use of terms.⁷⁸ As examples, the whiteness of wool and the whiteness of snow are not univocal. Numbers are so called univocally, but units, being indivisible, are not univocal with numbers. Socrates and Sophroniscus are both called men univocally. The being of simple and complex bodies—that is to say, the elements and the bodies they compose—is univocal. But 'being', like unity and some other predicates, cannot be a genus because it attaches to everything. If it were a genus, it would also be

⁷² Scholarios, iv. 45. 7 ff.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 47. 17-19.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 49. 25-7.

⁷³ Ibid. 46. 7-9.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 49. 9-11.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 50. 34 ff.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 47. 26 ff.

the genus of the other genera which attach to everything. Plethon mistakenly argues from predicates like man and animal to quite different predicates such as unity and being.

Scholarios pursues this reasoning in further detail. It is not necessary to follow him in equal detail, because the text of the *Defence of Aristotle* which eventually reached Plethon was incomplete. The gap which begins at this point covered a number of manuscript pages. Consequently there is no comment on them in Plethon's *Reply*.⁷⁹ For the sake of continuity, however, Scholarios' argument may be briefly summarized.

(XI. 7-9.) He finds further logical errors in Plethon's analysis of predication, and in particular of 'converse predication'. Scholarios takes up the challenge which Plethon had thrown down to Aristotle: 'if he concocts "rationality" in order to make that rather than "reasoning faculty" the differentia of animal, we can retort by concocting "animality" and make him give us its differentia'. Very reasonably, he points out that Aristotle never used either term; and he argues that the logical character of the two terms is quite different.⁸⁰ But in the absence of any retort from Plethon, this argument peters out.

(XI. 10-12.) Scholarios quotes *De Differentiis* as saying that Aristotle erred in making the particular superior to the universal. It follows naturally from Plethon's adoption of the theory of Forms that he must so argue, for the same Greek word means both 'form' and 'species', and the species and genera are what Aristotle calls universals. Aristotle regards the universals as simply abstractions made by the human mind. They are neither substances nor sources of being nor even separate from particulars except in a purely logical sense.⁸¹ The particular has more substance or being than the universal simply in the sense that Socrates has more being than 'man'.

Plethon's argument merely compares 'all men' with 'every man', which are two names for the same thing. He should have compared 'every man' with 'man', the latter being the true universal.⁸² 'What Plethon hashes up in his argument about the non-universal universal is totally irrelevant to the subject, and consists merely of empty noises, which do not even call for a reply from me.'⁸³ It would have been interesting to have seen Plethon's reply to this scornful outburst, which fortunately or unfortunately he never read.

⁷⁹ The gap extends from Scholarios, iv. 56. 8 to iv. 71. 33. See Masai (1956), 407.

⁸⁰ Scholarios, iv. 57. 17 ff.

⁸¹ Ibid. 60. 1 ff.

⁸² Ibid. 63. 7-16.

⁸³ Ibid. 63. 18-20.

But Scholarios himself adds that the argument is in any case sterile. If it had to be held that the end for which nature produces things is either the genus or the species, then it would have to be the species. But in fact it is neither.⁸⁴ God's purpose is directed only upon the perpetuation of the succession of individuals; and 'the individual is nothing other than the species itself embodied in its individuating characteristics'.⁸⁵ The individual is therefore superior to the species because it contains the species in its entirety within itself, and in addition possesses actual instead of merely potential being.⁸⁶

It does not follow that knowledge of the particular is superior to that of the universal. On the contrary, the reverse is true, since knowledge of the universal is more accurate and that of the particular is mere sensation. But this distinction does not depend (as Plato and Plethon supposed) on the quality of the subject-matter in each case.⁸⁷ Considered as subject-matter, the particular is superior to the universal because the particular is a reality and the universal a mere concept. Indeed, the particular is the cause of the universal possessing being at all.⁸⁸ The first book of the *Defence of Aristotle* ends at this point.

Book ii begins on a more menacing note, but one which still never came to Plethon's ears because it falls within the lacuna in the incomplete text which reached him. 'So far it has been a pleasure for me to debate with Plethon, since he seemed to be motivated by some kind of reason'; but no longer from this point onwards.⁸⁹ One might as well leave it to 'ignorant fools' to accept what he says, but Scholarios feels obliged to continue the task 'which I undertook out of sympathy for Aristotle and the truth'.⁹⁰ He will be brief, however, 'for why should one refute at length what ought to be simply ignored?'⁹¹

(XI. 13.) First, Plethon has criticized Aristotle for saying that 'the universal is analogous to matter, the particular to form'.⁹² But Aristotle said no such thing. What he actually said was that the genus is analogous to matter and the differentia to form. Of this there are many examples in the *Metaphysics* and in his logical treatises.⁹³ The only excuse for Plethon misunderstanding him is to be found in the fact that the word *εἶδος* has more than one meaning. Scholarios points out, among other examples, that it means both form as distinct from

⁸⁴ Scholarios, iv. 63. 25-7.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 64. 31 ff.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 68. 5-6.

⁹³ Ibid. 68. 20-7.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 63. 30-1.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 66. 35-67. 29.

⁹¹ Ibid. 68. 6-7.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 64. 10-14.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 67. 34-8.

⁹² Ibid. 68. 8-9.

matter and species as distinct from genus.⁹⁴ For the same reason as before, there is no reply from Plethon.

(XI. 14.) Next, Plethon has criticized Aristotle for arguing that a sensible object can exist prior to any act of sensation. This argument, Plethon says, contradicts the accepted view that relatives and correlatives must necessarily exist simultaneously. Scholarios replies that Plethon has misunderstood Aristotle's analysis of relations, though in this case 'without deliberately misrepresenting him, as elsewhere'.⁹⁵ Relatives and correlatives must necessarily exist simultaneously in the case of logical relations of concepts, such as double and half, master and slave, father and son.⁹⁶ But the objects of knowledge or sensation can exist potentially in the absence of anyone knowing or sensing them.⁹⁷ Plethon has failed to see when Aristotle was talking of concepts and when of real things underlying the concepts.⁹⁸

That is the last point to which Plethon was unable to reply because of the lacuna in his copy of the *Defence of Aristotle*. His defective text begins to resume Scholarios' argument from the immediately following point onwards. He is now confronted by one of the most contentious and complex points raised against him. It arose from the same paragraph in *De Differentiis* which puzzled the Emperor and led to the letters exchanged between them.

(XI. 15-16.) Plethon had criticized Aristotle's argument that the negatives of certain types of proposition, though contrary to those propositions, did not necessarily contradict them. He accused Aristotle of disregarding the universally accepted principle of contradiction. Scholarios quotes from the same passage of Aristotle to show that Plethon has misconstrued him.⁹⁹

Aristotle was distinguishing four types of proposition: A—Every man is white; B—Not every man is white; C—Some men are white; D—No man is white.¹⁰⁰ His point was that A and B are 'contradictorily opposed', but A and D are only contrary or antithetical. Plethon's interpretation of the principle of contradiction would eliminate this distinction. Scholarios rebuts his argument on two grounds.¹⁰¹ First, it would mean that there could be two different contradictories of the same proposition. Secondly, it would commit the fallacy to which Aristotle himself pointed, of confusing the concept of 'not being a white man' with that of 'no one being a white man'. He points out, for

⁹⁴ Ibid. 69. 2-11.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 70. 9-10.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 70. 30-6.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 70. 39-40.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 71. 30-2.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 73. 10-12.

¹⁰⁰ *De Interpret.* vii. 17^b30 ff.

¹⁰¹ Scholarios, iv. 73. 29-35.

example, that what is described as 'not a white man' might logically not be a man at all but a stick or something else, whether white or not. Plethon, in fact, is 'destitute of logical method', and incapable of grasping the 'pith' of Aristotle, seeing only the outer surface.¹⁰² (XV. 26.)

(XI. 17-18) In the next passage Scholarios admits an error in Aristotle, but without wholly accepting Plethon's criticism. Aristotle had said that 'every mind is in essence actuality' (or 'activity'). Plethon argued that this phrase could not be applied to the human mind, which is often inactive.¹⁰³ Scholarios recognizes that this is so, but points out that Aristotle did not really regard the essence and the actuality of the human mind as identical. He distinguished between the potentiality and the actuality of the human mind, and did not regard it as simple, like the mind of God.¹⁰⁴

When he said that 'every mind is in essence actuality', he meant every divine mind, for he believed in a hierarchy of gods under the supreme God. That of course was an error, but it was an error shared with Plato, and cannot therefore be used to claim that Plato was superior to him. The only flaw in Aristotle's argument lay in 'dividing the divine nature'.¹⁰⁵ A long passage follows showing how he correctly distinguished the divine and the human mind, though many others before Plethon have misunderstood him.¹⁰⁶

(XI. 19.) Plethon again accuses Aristotle of self-contradiction in holding that the mind exists prior to its entry into the body but denying the Platonic doctrine of learning by recollection. It is true, Scholarios admits, that Aristotle says the mind must enter the body from outside, since the seed cannot transmit something eternal and indestructible.¹⁰⁷ 'But I do not believe that it is Aristotle's view that the mind had a prior existence on its own somewhere else, and was then united with the body'.¹⁰⁸

Nor did Aristotle hold that each mind is individually created by God, either prior to the body or from outside it or contained within it, 'though I very much wish he were of that opinion'.¹⁰⁹ His view is to be explained in terms of a transition from potentiality to actuality, initiated by the seed: the soul being 'the completion of the body' and the mind being 'the most powerful and only indestructible part of the

¹⁰² Scholarios, iv. 74. 30-2.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 75. 4-11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 75. 11-18, based on *De Anima*, iii. 430^a14 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Scholarios, iv. 76. 22-4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 76-8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 78. 16-26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 78. 33-5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 78. 38-79. 2.

soul'. So the mind is prior in essence—that is, superior in kind—to the body, but not in generation.¹¹⁰ (XV. 27.) Scholarios vigorously repudiates any idea that Aristotle believed in reincarnation.¹¹¹

It is impossible in any case to conceive how pre-existing souls could be united with bodies from outside. If they were united under compulsion, the resulting union would be contrary to nature.¹¹² If God imposed such a union, it could only be as a punishment, and as such it would be inappropriate; 'for punishment, being contrary to the good of the punished, must necessarily be something bad for him, whereas union of the soul with the body is naturally good, and this is the natural end of creation'.¹¹³ The only remaining possibility is that the union should be the result of chance—which is 'obviously false and the source of many absurdities'.¹¹⁴

Equally absurd is Plato's doctrine of learning by recollection. Once the process of recollection began, why should it not be total and instantaneous instead of gradual? It is simpler to assume that man has a natural capacity for learning. 'But I have no intention now of refuting the recollections and reincarnations and previous existences which the Platonists enjoy so much.' So all this is by the way, 'merely to defend Aristotle against Plethon's insults'.¹¹⁵

(XI. 20.) Plethon's next criticism is that in the *Ethics* Aristotle makes no use of his doctrine that the human mind is eternal and indestructible. This is to criticize Aristotle not for what he says but for what he does not say.¹¹⁶ It was not Aristotle's practice, as it was Plato's, to mix up different intellectual disciplines, such as physics, mathematics and theology. (XV. 28.) He clearly indicates in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the theory of mind belongs elsewhere, that is to say in the *Metaphysics*. Even in the *Physics* he does not explicitly speak of the mind as eternal and indestructible, but only by implication.

Moreover, Plethon is mistaken in claiming that Aristotle omitted to say that what is most essential to man is mind: he said it clearly in the *Ethics*.¹¹⁷ 'Thus Aristotle is consistent with himself and all other philosophers, including Plato himself where appropriate, and his own words refute his slanderers.'¹¹⁸ Plethon is wrong again in arguing that Aristotle did not believe in life after death. When he spoke of death as the end, in the *Ethics*, he only meant the end of worldly experiences,

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 79. 2 ff.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 80. 22-7.

¹¹² Ibid. 80. 37-81. 3.

¹¹³ Ibid. 81. 15-24.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 81. 24-7.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 82. 35-83. 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 83. 4-14.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 83. 34-84. 1, quoting *Eth. Nic.* 1178^a5-7.

¹¹⁸ Scholarios, iv. 84. 3-5.

whether good or bad. No serious person could criticize Aristotle on these matters.¹¹⁹

(XI. 21-2.) Next comes Plethon's criticism of Aristotle's doctrine that virtues are means and vices are extremes. Here he shows his ignorance of Aristotle, who did not say that all means are virtues and all extremes are vices, but only that where virtue lies in a mean, there the extremes are vices. Not every action or condition admits of a mean: for example, jealousy and adultery are absolute vices, not merely extreme deviations from a mean.¹²⁰ Scholarios ridicules Plethon's picture of the man who desires everything, both right and wrong, as only 'half-wicked'. In reality there cannot be such a person, though a man's desires may shift from time to time, and with them his character.¹²¹ (XV. 29.)

Plethon is also wrong in saying that Aristotle defined virtue in quantitative rather than qualitative terms. His criteria actually are 'when, in what circumstances, towards whom, for what purpose, and how it should be; and this is the mean and the best'.¹²² Thus, he did not define courage in terms of the magnitude of the dangers confronted, but in terms of duty and reason.¹²³

Aristotle recognized that some dangers are so great that a man cannot be blamed for being afraid of them, provided that such a fear does not lead him into wicked actions. Other fears are so irrational as to become vices. Scholarios takes up the example cited by Plethon, but with a distortion. 'Plethon says that it is senseless not to be afraid of thunderstorms'; but in fact that was Aristotle's view, which Plethon contested.¹²⁴ Scholarios argues that it may be senseless not to fear such things, but sensible men may endure them in return for some benefit. He also rejects Plethon's argument that even if a man is afraid of 'thunderstorms and earthquakes and fissures in the earth', there is nothing he can do about it. On the contrary, says Scholarios, people can go and live in areas where these things are not so liable to occur. If they do not fear such dangers, they are ignorant or irrational, either because they have no experience of them or because they despise human life. But this does not apply to the Christians who chose martyrdom. They acted under divine guidance, which Aristotle could not have had.

¹¹⁹ Scholarios, vi. 84. 6 ff. The view in question is presented as debatable in *Eth. Nic.* i. 1100^a14-21, and 1101^a34-1101^b9.

¹²⁰ Scholarios, iv. 86. 23-87. 16.

¹²² Ibid. 89. 16-18.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 91. 1; Lagarde, 328. 20-8. Both Plethon and Scholarios introduce 'fear of thunderstorms' to add to Aristotle's 'fear of earthquakes or waves': *Eth. Nic.* iii. 1115^b27.

¹²⁵ Scholarios, iv. 91. 9-92. 12.

¹²¹ Ibid. 87. 16 ff.

¹²³ Ibid. 90. 9-17.

(XI. 23-5.) Next, Plethon mistakenly argues that Aristotle did not regard wicked acts arising from an irresistible fear as constituting vice. He is in effect mischievously looking for excuses to malign Aristotle.¹²⁶ The same can be said of his treatment of Aristotle's definition of the end of man. Aristotle did not, as Plethon stated, make the pleasure of contemplation the end of man. He only says that pleasure always accompanies contemplation. The ultimate end must be that which is most appropriate and peculiar to man, namely the intellectual life. It is this rather than moral virtue which makes a man most godlike.¹²⁷

Scholarios concludes that Aristotle identified neither pleasure nor virtue with the ultimate good, but only the knowledge of truth; and in that belief he was in accord with scriptural authority.¹²⁸ But he held nevertheless that pleasure follows upon the achievement of the end, because every activity is completed by pleasure in the sense that pleasure follows every activity, but not in the sense that every activity is directed towards pleasure as its particular end.¹²⁹ (XV. 30.)

(XI. 26-8.) Next he defends Aristotle's theory of the 'fifth element'. The heavenly bodies cannot be composed of the same four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) as physical objects in the world around us, because they are eternal and indestructible. Moreover, their motion is circular, which is not natural to earthly bodies. Plethon argues that even fire can move in a circle; but it does so only momentarily, under compulsion, whereas heavenly bodies move always and exclusively in a circle.¹³⁰ (XV. 31.)

Scholarios then appeals to past authorities, such as Plato's *Timaeus*. Plato says that God preserves the heavenly bodies from dissolution although their nature is to dissolve.¹³¹ Why should he not rather have created them of an indestructible substance in the first place? Plato says that they are made indestructible by the implantation in them of immortal souls; but immortal souls do not make the human body indestructible. In practice Scholarios says that he can detect little difference on this point between Plato and Aristotle, but he thinks Aristotle's innovation is an improvement.¹³²

(XI. 29-30.) Aristotle's 'fifth element' is also consistent with his account of the transmission of heat from the sun. Essentially the cause of heat in heavenly bodies lies in their motion. 'So the movement of the sun is sufficient for it to transmit heat to lower bodies without any

¹²⁶ Ibid. 92. 13-37.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 93. 1 ff.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 94. 30-95. 6.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 94. 15-18, based on *Eth. Nic.* x. 1175^a19-21.

¹³⁰ Scholarios, iv. 95. 18-96. 21.

¹³¹ *Timaeus*, 41 B.

¹³² Scholarios, iv. 97. 7-98. 20.

need for it to be naturally hot itself, like fire; so that nature does nothing purposelessly.¹³³ Aristotle further shows how lower bodies are capable of receiving heat from the sun, but 'there is no need to present these proofs, since even Plethon does not presume to contradict them'.¹³⁴

Plethon does absurdly invoke the example of the moon, which he says ought, on Aristotle's argument, also to generate heat like the sun, because although it moves much more slowly it is much nearer to the earth. But he overlooks the fact that Aristotle says that only very fast motion generates heat. Proximity cannot compensate for very slow motion. So Plethon is not justified in arguing that something other than motion gives the sun the power to generate heat.¹³⁵

On the movement of the stars, Scholarios makes a concession: 'I do not wish stubbornly to defend Aristotle's view, since my intention is to examine all these matters in a spirit of truth.'¹³⁶ The fact is that Aristotle is contradicted by sacred authority. Scholarios even agrees with Plethon that the stars cannot be moved only by the motion of the heavenly spheres, if they are alive as Aristotle himself says.¹³⁷ The views of Ptolemy and of 'the majority of sacred teachers' are to be preferred: the former holding that the stars have a motion of their own as well as that of the spheres; the latter that they are not fixed in the solid firmament—'although Moses seems to take that view, asserting what is apparent to the senses, in conformity with Jewish custom'.¹³⁸

'They are each moved rather by some kind of mental entities', Scholarios continues; 'not formally united with them but by a sort of dynamic contact, rather as Plato supposed souls to be united with bodies.'¹³⁹ He suggests that his own view differs from Plato's only in calling the heavenly bodies 'living' in an equivocal rather than a univocal sense. Aristotle hints at the same conclusion in the *Physics*.¹⁴⁰ 'All this goes to show that Aristotle's innovation with regard to the fifth element is philosophically sound, and preferable to what most of his predecessors used to say.'¹⁴¹

(XI. 31-2.) Scholarios turns next to the misrepresentation of Aristotle's statement that 'art exercises no deliberation', which Plethon had used to suggest that Aristotle was practically an atheist. Aristotle clearly meant not that an art has no purpose but that it does not

¹³³ Scholarios, iv. 98. 28-31.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 98. 32-8.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 99. 19-28.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 99. 32-4.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 99. 37-9.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 99. 40-100. 4.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 100. 4-6.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 100. 8-16, perhaps based on *Physics*, viii. 259^b28-30.

¹⁴¹ Scholarios, iv. 100. 16-18.

involve conscious thought about its products. (XV. 32.) The writer does not need to think out the spelling of his words; the musician does not need to think about every note he plays; the unskilled craftsman, who needs to think what he is doing, has less need to do so as he acquires more skill.¹⁴²

In this respect art imitates nature. Nature does not need to think in order to produce its effects, but this does not mean that nature has no purpose. Aristotle was simply refuting those who argue that whatever does not deliberate does not act for a purpose. Plethon has misunderstood him: he has treated deliberation as the indispensable constituent of an art or craft, and therefore argued that if deliberation is absent the art or craft ceases to exist. The contrary is the case.¹⁴³

Since Plethon's argument ended with an insinuation of atheism, to which Scholarios was especially sensitive on Aristotle's behalf, he pursues his refutation further. 'If to deliberate means to conceive, then it follows that everything arrives at its proper end as a result of a mind deliberating first—that is to say, conceiving and formulating the end first in itself, as he puts it. But that is not how the word is used.'¹⁴⁴ Deliberating (*βουλευέσθαι*) implies taking counsel (*βουλή*), says Scholarios: the words in Greek are etymologically connected. People do not deliberate about the end to be achieved but how to achieve it. Thus a general does not deliberate about the desirability of victory, nor a craftsman about the craft which he has mastered, 'since deliberation is a quest but the principles of a craft impose each step with certainty'. Similarly nature acts for a purpose, without need of deliberation (that is, taking counsel).¹⁴⁵ It acts as if from precise judgement, not pursuing a quest but proceeding in every case by determinate means which can hardly fail to achieve its end.¹⁴⁶

What Plethon called deliberation is the proposition of the end in view. But in fact there is no deliberation about the end, only about the means. Aristotle uses the word more accurately when he argues that nature does not deliberate about things which come to be, nor art about manufactured things.¹⁴⁷ This does not lead Aristotle into atheism: 'on the contrary, Plethon seems to be the atheist because of his terrible misrepresentation of Aristotle, else he would have been afraid of the penalties laid down by the deity for evil men'.¹⁴⁸

That Aristotle was no atheist is proved by a passage in the *Ethics*

¹⁴² Ibid. 100. 19-101. 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 101. 11-102. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 102. 3-7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 102. 10-103. 24.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 103. 24-6.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 103. 27-104. 7, based on *Physics*, ii. 199^b28-30.

¹⁴⁸ Scholarios, iv. 104. 9-11.

where he said that the man who pursues an intellectual life is likely to be most dear to the gods, if they have any concern for human affairs, as they are believed to have; and that means the philosopher.¹⁴⁹ Scholarios adds other quotations about the happiness of God, this time in the singular. 'So much for Aristotle's reverence for the deity, which I also recognize to the same extent in Plato; and no one could any longer be convinced by Plethon's slanders.'¹⁵⁰

(XI. 33-5.) Another of Plethon's 'slanders and follies' is his criticism of Aristotle for saying that some things which come to be do so without a cause.¹⁵¹ If Aristotle said that, one must pay attention to his use of words. He used the term 'coming to be' or generation to describe natural phenomena. For other occurrences he used the term 'making'.¹⁵² (XV. 33.) There are also various senses in which he used the word 'cause': for example, he sometimes identified proximity with causation.¹⁵³ In the case of natural generation some things are 'made' from seed, and some come to be spontaneously or 'automatically' (*ἐξ αὐτομάτου*) without any external agency. Examples of the latter are certain plants and animals such as wasps and worms.¹⁵⁴

What Aristotle called spontaneous generation can be compared with accidental cures in medicine or accidental strokes by an artist, where something happens 'not without a cause but without the prior occurrence of its appropriate cause'.¹⁵⁵ Plethon's criticism that Aristotle was undermining belief in the deity was therefore quite misconceived. His suggestion that Aristotle's only example of an uncaused occurrence was 'deliberation' shows that he had not understood what Aristotle was talking about.¹⁵⁶

'Plethon's arguments against Aristotle will only succeed in convincing the uneducated.'¹⁵⁷ There is, however, a simple rule by which to test the comparative merits of Plato and Aristotle. 'This rule is that I find Plato embarking on his arguments in a general and confused manner, either because he likes to colour philosophy with rhetoric in this way or because he actually thought it a better style of philosophy; whereas Aristotle handles his argument in a precise, clear, and

¹⁴⁹ Scholarios, iv. 104. 17-25, based on *Eth. Nic.* x. 1179^a22-32.

¹⁵⁰ Scholarios, iv. 105. 1-3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 105. 21-9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 105. 34-106. 3.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 106. 4-12, based on *Met.* viii. 1044^b1-2.

¹⁵⁴ Scholarios, iv. 106. 18-30.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 107. 29-33.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 107. 34-108. 13. In this paragraph, exceptionally, Scholarios addresses Plethon in the second person singular, although the treatise is nominally addressed to the Despot Constantine.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 108. 15-16.

relevant manner, as becomes a philosopher if he is to play a leading part in teaching philosophy.¹⁵⁸ Examples can be found in their respective theories of motion and of the heavenly bodies. Scholarios has already dealt with the latter, and now turns to the former.¹⁵⁹

(XI. 36.) According to Plethon, Aristotle failed to recognize that motion has a dual and equivocal meaning. In fact Aristotle did recognize that the word has many senses: for example, stimulation of the senses, the extension of magnitude, progress towards perfection, and the transition from potentiality to actuality.¹⁶⁰ Motion is a kind of incomplete actuality, an intermediate stage between what precedes and what follows—the imperfect and the perfect, the potential and the actual. Thus there are two verbs applicable to movement: to make it and to take it—that is, to impart and to receive an impulse. It is both active and passive. These are two distinct actualities, one lying in the agent of movement, the other in the recipient.¹⁶¹

Aristotle was perfectly aware of this distinction. If in a particular passage he mentioned only one of these actualities, it was for the sake of brevity and not, as Plethon implies, to eliminate the prime mover or God. On the contrary, the unmoved first cause of motion is an essential element in his philosophy.¹⁶² Plato, on the other hand, uses the word 'motion' in a vague and confused sense, though fortunately it is not impossible to reconcile his views, as modified by Aristotle, with the truth.¹⁶³

(XI. 37-56.) That is the last point in *De Differentiis* on which Scholarios specifically commented in his *Defence of Aristotle*. It provoked no direct retort from Plethon, no doubt because Scholarios has in the end proffered an olive branch in the direction of Plato. But on the whole of the second part of *De Differentiis*, which dealt with the theory of Forms, Scholarios has nothing more to say. The subject is, he agrees, of great importance, but it must be postponed for another occasion. (He never, in fact, wrote anything more on the subject.) Suffice it to say for the present that right-thinking opinion is generally on Aristotle's side against Plato.¹⁶⁴

He concedes, however, that Plethon has made a good case for Plato, and deserves praise for the skill and vigour with which he has attacked Aristotle, 'to an extent and in a way which I know that no other living

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 108. 20-6.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 109. 36-110. 32.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 113. 23-32.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 108. 26-33.

¹⁶² Ibid. 111. 18-112. 17.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 109. 3-35.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 113. 5-21.

Hellene could have done.’¹⁶⁵ It is a two-edged compliment. As usual, Scholarios oscillates between admiration and disapproval of his elder rival. He has tried, he says, to reply temperately and with courtesy, though initially he was provoked into abusive language by Plethon’s excesses. In particular, he could not fail to resist the implied attack on ‘our faith in the deity’.¹⁶⁶

Plethon had more than once suggested that Aristotelianism was incompatible with that faith. Scholarios reverses the charge, plunging straight into the attack which was always at the heart of his *Defence of Aristotle*. Plethon, he says, ‘has been accused by a great many people, who appear to carry conviction, maintaining that they have come across a work of his promulgating an ideal system of laws’.¹⁶⁷ This is his first reference to what was to become known as the *Book of Laws*, though he later claimed to have heard of it before they went to Italy.¹⁶⁸ Later still, he wrote that Plethon himself gave it the title *Ἀρίστη Νομοθεσία*,¹⁶⁹ though it is commonly known as *Νόμων Συγγραφή*.

In the *Defence of Aristotle*, his accusation continues:

These people have copied out extracts from it and shown them to be full of the ancient nonsense of the Hellenes. They think that the style of argument, which it is hard to believe is not by our friend, supports this view in the opinion of every competent judge; and they say that the book is inscribed ‘Plethon’, whether for concealment or to show his great interest in the Hellenization of names, even on the title-page; or for some other reason. I hear many explanations, and people were concerned to know all about it.¹⁷⁰

This was another reason why Scholarios was more severe on Plethon than merely from good will towards Aristotle.¹⁷¹

‘So if the story is true, and there is some work of Plethon’s telling us of an ideal system of laws, and if the writer is indeed Plethon, then let him send it to us.’¹⁷² By publishing it Plethon will either convince us and win our admiration; or, if he is proved wrong, he will have the opportunity of recanting and returning to the path of truth ‘which it seems he so much loves’.¹⁷³ But if he persists in concealing it, he will stand convicted by default.

If he has been misrepresented, and if in fact he recognizes that ‘there is not and cannot be anything more sacred and true than Christ’s system of laws’, then Scholarios will respect Plethon as his

¹⁶⁵ Scholarios iv. 114. 5-6.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 155. 30-156. 1.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 114. 29-30.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 114. 17-18.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 180. 30-1.

¹⁷² Ibid. 114. 30-3.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 114. 18-20.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 114. 20-7.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 114. 36-115. 1.

teacher, though he will not accept his criticism of Aristotle except on a few marginal points.¹⁷⁴ He will not be influenced by jealousy to contradict Plethon on any other issue, for he knows him to be on the side of truth. 'Moreover, I love him for his moral qualities, in which he has taken care to practise the best, and for his wisdom, in which he is second to none of the philosophers of our time.'¹⁷⁵

Although it is obvious that Scholarios knows that the author of *De Differentiis* and of the heretical work in progress are one and the same, he once more pretends ignorance in order to give him a last loop-hole of escape. If he is not really the Plethon who has attacked Christianity, then he has only to write to one of his friends and deny all knowledge of that so-called Plethon, affirming his orthodoxy and denouncing 'Hellenic superstition and those who have been misled by it'.¹⁷⁶ Once he has done that, he is bound to approve the arguments of Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle*, apart from the abuse, which is directed only at 'the Plethon whom his detractors have invented'.¹⁷⁷ God will forgive him for his errors, particularly the charge that Aristotle believed eternal substances to be self-generating, whereas in fact Aristotle had severely criticized those who said that heaven came into existence spontaneously.¹⁷⁸

That this charge is the gravamen of Scholarios' complaint against Plethon is shown by a final reaffirmation of Aristotle's orthodoxy:

For if Aristotle criticizes those who say that heaven exists spontaneously, but then does not assign to it any cause like that of animals and plants, clearly he means that heaven and the whole universe come into being, if not at a moment of time, at least from a definite and ordained cause which makes them; and that which makes them is either mind or something superior to mind, if he allows the cause of even animals and plants to be either nature or mind or something else of the kind.¹⁷⁹

The final paragraph of the *Defence of Aristotle* repeats that it was wrong on Plethon's part to make Aristotle appear 'stupid and ignorant', unless it were merely as an intellectual exercise. In that case he should have said so, and should have submitted Plato to the same treatment. But this was not Plethon's intention. He genuinely intended to damage Aristotle in the general opinion, though 'for what reason he was so malicious, and how he hoped to convince everyone, I pass over for the present'.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 115. 7-12.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 115. 28-30.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 116. 11-22.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 115. 17-19.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 115. 30-116. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 115. 20-6.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 116. 3-9.

This last paragraph has a special point of interest. In the manuscript preserved on Mount Athos (Dionysianus Athonensis 330), which Scholarios corrected with his own hand, the name 'Gemistos' twice appears in place of 'Plethon'.¹⁸¹ Since this cannot have been an oversight, it looks like a deliberate warning that Scholarios knew perfectly well with whom he was dealing.

¹⁸¹ Scholarios, iv. 116. 11, 116. 19, and footnotes to pp. 1 and 116.

XIV

YEARS OF PERIL

IT is presumed that Scholarios finished the *Defence of Aristotle* in the second half of 1443 or the first half of 1444 at the latest.¹ But it did not become public till some years later. The essay was nominally addressed to the Despot Constantine, but he was not the first to see it; nor was Plethon, who had to wait probably as long as five years before receiving his copy clandestinely through Michael Apostoles.² The delay was partly due to Scholarios' wish to have Mark Eugenikos' opinion on his work first.³ There is no evidence to show what that opinion was. It might have been critical, or it might be that he died before he could express an opinion at all. So much importance did Scholarios attach to Eugenikos' approval that he would have hesitated in either case.

His covering letter to Eugenikos showed a genuine perplexity. He did not want to be severe to Plethon, 'for I have never felt any envy of good men'.⁴ He said that many friends had asked for copies of his essay, but he must have Eugenikos' opinion on it first: should he let it be circulated or should he commit it to the flames?⁵ His Christian conscience would not let the matter rest.

Plethon (whom he now called Gemistos again) was a genuine puzzle to him. 'Some say that he is pious in his views about the deity, and deny that he is either teaching or composing any kind of a new system of laws, in which our faith is torn to shreds, but that we are promoting this story about him, and that time will prove us greatly mistaken.'⁶ So there were ugly rumours to consider, as well as the ambiguous text of *De Differentiis*. But Scholarios had to recognize Plethon's personal merits and his unequalled scholarship in the classics; 'and in morals he would be a model to young people who sincerely care about virtue'.⁷ His ignorance of dialectical method was a handicap, but not an uncommon one among the Greeks. Here Scholarios hints once more at the superiority of scholasticism. But after weighing up all the

¹ Introduction to Scholarios, iv. p. iv.

² Alexandre, 370; Legrand (1962), ii. 233; see also Masai (1956), 406, for the date.

³ Scholarios, iv. 116. 33.

⁴ Ibid. 117. 3-4.

⁵ Ibid. 118. 4-18.

⁶ Ibid. 117. 10-14.

⁷ Ibid. 117. 18-19.

evidence, he cannot decide. It is for Eugenikos alone to judge what should be done with Scholarios' work. 'You know the man better than I do', he concludes: 'your verdict will suffice better than everyone else's.'⁸

So far as the documentary evidence goes, there followed a long silence on the subject. The *Defence of Aristotle* was not suppressed, but it was given no publicity for several years. Scholarios was preoccupied with more urgent tasks. The death of Eugenikos (probably on 23 June 1444) marked a turning-point in his own life.⁹ He had long wanted to retire from public life into a monastery, and Eugenikos had chided him (at least according to one interpretation of a critical letter to him) for his delay in doing so.¹⁰ But Scholarios felt that duty still required him to remain near the centre of power, if only to carry out Eugenikos' behest that he should lead the anti-Unionist cause.

The debate with the Latin delegation in late 1444 and early 1445 was Scholarios' first major commitment in this cause. It was inconclusive, but in the Greek view he had a triumphant success. The Latin representatives (among them Cardinal Isidore, the ex-Metropolitan of Kiev) returned to Italy to assemble material for a further debate, which took place, again inconclusively, in 1452.¹¹ By then papal supremacy in the West had been reasserted. The leading members of the Council of Basle had made their submission to the Pope, and the Council dispersed in 1449.

Much else had happened in the meantime.¹² The last crusade to save Constantinople had been defeated by the Turks near Varna in 1444, and Cardinal Cesarini, who accompanied the crusaders as papal legate, was killed in the battle. The Hexamilion had once more been rebuilt across the Isthmus of Corinth in 1444, and once more destroyed by the Turks in 1446. The Emperor John VIII died on 31 October 1448. Sultan Murat II died on 13 February 1451 and was succeeded by his son Mehmet II, soon to be known as the Conqueror. In the same year the last Unionist Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregorios III Mammias, fled to Rome to escape the contumely of the common people and the monks. This bitterness was stimulated by Scholarios from behind the barred door of his cell.

Mistra was not isolated from these events, nor were Plethon's last

⁸ Scholarios, iv. 118. 19-20.

⁹ Zisis, 169-70.

¹⁰ Id. 148-51.

¹¹ Id. 166-8.

¹² For the historical background of this and the following paragraphs, I have relied particularly on Nicol, 379-86, and S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople* (Cambridge 1965), 46-64.

years. Links between the Despotate and the capital remained as close as communications still allowed. John VIII had himself visited Mistra in 1444, to supervise the reconstruction of the Hexamilion. It was from there that he wrote an appeal for help to the King of Hungary, which led to the ill-fated crusade.¹³ Responsibility for the defence of the Peloponnese and the continuing counter-attack against the Franks rested mainly with his brother Constantine. It was to him that Bessarion, from the safety of Rome, addressed a letter of congratulation on the refortification of the Isthmus, accompanied by advice on political and economic reforms which echoed the advice given by Plethon a generation earlier to his father.¹⁴ But it was already too late.

Constantine nominally shared responsibility at first with his younger brother Thomas and later with their youngest brother Demetrios, but he was a stronger personality than either of them. It was to Constantine that all the leading figures of the day looked as the one man who might restore the fortunes of Byzantium. Theodore II, his elder brother and predecessor at Mistra, died in 1448. Scholarios wrote a funeral oration over him, full of abuse of the Peloponnesians.¹⁵ Later in the year, when John also died, Demetrios tried unsuccessfully to usurp the throne from Constantine. But Constantine was crowned at Mistra on 16 January 1449, and hastened back to his capital to be received as Emperor. One of his last acts at Mistra was to issue the Bull confirming Plethon's territorial privileges to his two sons.¹⁶

It was a profitless gift, for the Empire was doomed, as thoughtful Greeks already recognized. Plethon's young friend John Argyropoulos addressed a lament to the new Emperor on the death of his brother in typically Byzantine prose:

Now all the pride of the Hellenes is fallen, Hope has taken flight. . . . Shame and Nemesis have deserted mankind and fled to Olympus. Now the merest barbarians and all our enemies are exultant, and we are humbled and shrink from fear, and our state is like those whom the pilot has abandoned in the surge of the waves.¹⁷

It was true enough, except that the last pilot had not abandoned them and was to die on the battlements. The Greeks had no doubt that their disasters were a judgement of God. Most of them thought that their fatal mistake had been the acceptance of the Union, but Constantine

¹³ *Ioannis Dlugossi Historiae Polonicae libri XII*, ed. G. Groddeckius (Frankfurt 1711), i. 790-3, quoted in CMH iv. 1, p. 591 n. 2.

¹⁴ Mohler, iii. 439-49.

¹⁶ *Id.* iv. 19-22.

¹⁵ Lambros, ii. 7. 21-8. 6.

¹⁷ *Id.* iii. 314. 15-20.

still insisted that the decision must be respected. Plethon, however, believed in more worldly explanations, such as the failure of successive Emperors to act on his advice.

But he was no longer mainly concerned with political issues. Philosophy was his preoccupation, and it was concentrated on two major works: first, his *Reply to Scholarios' Defence of Aristotle*, and second, the *Book of Laws*. These are summarized in Chapters XV and XVII respectively. The *Reply* was probably begun only about 1448, but the *Laws* had been compiled intermittently since the 1430s. Parts of it were copied out and even published separately: for example, the *Summary of the Doctrines of Zoroaster and Plato*, which is virtually a preamble to the *Laws*; *On Fate*, which forms chapter 6 of book ii of the *Laws*; *On the generation of the gods*, which is chapter 15 of book iii; and the *Order of months and years*, which forms part of chapter 36 of book iii. A few other titles of philosophical essays, recorded by Leon Allatios, are either not extant or probably spurious.¹⁸

Plethon could not, however, detach himself entirely from the theological debate which followed the Council of Union. Among the titles attributed to him are one *On the Incarnation of the Son of God* and another *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*. Both are recorded by Allatios, but only the latter has been found since his day (at Rome by Masai).¹⁹ It too remains unpublished. It is distinct from a better-known work, the *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*. The background to the latter work, despite its theological title, shows that its composition was linked with the controversy between Plethon and Scholarios on the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle.

Plethon completed his *Reply to the Defence of Aristotle* towards the end of the decade, probably in 1449.²⁰ He sent a copy to Constantine, who was by then reigning at Constantinople if that date is correct. Since the *Defence of Aristotle* had been addressed to Constantine as Despot at Mistra, it was natural that he should also receive the *Reply*. But Plethon sent no copy of the *Reply* to Scholarios, although it was nominally addressed to him in the second person singular. Scholarios learned of its contents at first only from others who had seen it, and this naturally annoyed him.²¹

¹⁸ PG 160. 781-6.

¹⁹ Ibid. 789-90, para. 24; Masai (1954), 551-2.

²⁰ Mamalakis (1939), 198, dates the *Reply* to 1446-7; Alexandre, p. xxxiv, to 1448-9; and Masai (1956), 406, dates it not earlier than 1449.

²¹ Scholarios, iv. 119. 5 ff.

At almost the same time Plethon was working on another essay, ostensibly a work of orthodox theology, known as the *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*. This essay soon reached the hands of Scholarios, who wrote a letter of congratulation on it to Plethon, probably in 1450.²² At the same time he complained that he had not seen the *Reply* to his own *Defence of Aristotle*. He also hinted at his suspicions of Plethon's orthodoxy, in veiled language which he was to make much more explicit after Plethon's death.

The chronology of these writings is indicated by internal evidence. Scholarios' congratulatory letter to Plethon cannot be dated earlier than 1450, since in it he refers to himself as a monk, and it was in that year that he entered monastic life. The letter contains references both to Plethon's *Reply* to the *Defence of Aristotle* and to the essay on the Latin doctrine. It also refers to Constantine as Emperor rather than Despot. The last stage of the controversy between Plethon and Scholarios thus lay between 1449, when Constantine was crowned, and 1452, when Plethon died.

The controversy now turned, as Scholarios' letter repeatedly emphasized, no longer on the respective merits of Plato and Aristotle but on the more fundamental question of Christian orthodoxy. The question had been brought to the surface by the Council of Union and its aftermath, but it had later taken a new form, which was the more serious for being partly concealed. This was the revival of paganism, in which Scholarios suspected that Plethon was involved.

There is other evidence besides Scholarios' letter to Plethon that this suspicion was growing in his mind, and there were others besides Scholarios who shared it. Two further letters from Scholarios' hand confirm it. One was addressed to the Peloponnesian official, Manuel Raoul Oises, congratulating him on the execution of the heretic Juvenal (Iouvenalios), which was written about 1451-2, in Plethon's life-time.²³ The second, addressed to the Exarch Joseph, was written after Plethon's death, but referred to much earlier events.²⁴ The detailed contents of these letters can be left to be examined in their chronological place. Here it may be noted that the evidence on which their accusations rested was already available, and probably known to Scholarios, as early as the 1430s.

The letter to Oises shows a detailed knowledge of Juvenal's career covering many years. Apart from holding heretical beliefs and

²² Ibid. 118-51 (see pp. 278-81 below).

²³ Ibid. 476-89 (see pp. 315-18 below).

²⁴ Ibid. 155-72 (see pp. 359-61 below).

communicating them orally to others, Scholarios says that he put them in writing, though less boldly. One such document was written 'before the Council in Italy'.²⁵ Juvenal, he says, learned his pagan ideas from a 'brotherhood' (*φατρία*) in the Peloponnese; and he mentions several doctrines which are to be found in the *Book of Laws*, though he does not name Plethon.²⁶ The implied connection between Juvenal and Plethon evidently became known before long, for a manuscript in the Patriarchal Library at Jerusalem contains a clear reference to the letter, describing it as 'from Gennadios of Constantinople to the Peloponnesians against the polytheism of Gemistos while Manuel Rales was despot'.²⁷

To the Exarch Joseph, after Plethon's death, Scholarios wrote more explicitly. He had known even before their journey to Italy, he says, that Plethon had been engaged for several years in writing a blasphemous work (the *Book of Laws*). His letter to Plethon in or about 1450, commending him for his *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*, had been intended to convey a threat and a warning, which were not without effect.²⁸ He had also included hints that he was aware of Plethon's heresies in the final paragraphs of his own *Defence of Aristotle*.²⁹ It is clear, then, that in his letter to the Exarch Joseph he was not simply being wise after the event.

Nor was he the only contemporary intellectual to be suspicious of Plethon in his lifetime. Among those who shared his suspicions the most explicit were George Trapezuntius and Matthew Kamariotes. The details of their attacks on Plethon belong to a later chapter, since they were written after Plethon's death; but again it is noteworthy that the evidence on which they based their attacks was available to them in his lifetime.

Kamariotes had at one time warmly admired Plethon, as he showed in his letter to Kabakes about the essay *On Virtues*.³⁰ But he attacked Plethon posthumously (perhaps in the very year of his death) on the basis in particular of the essay *De Fato*, which had been circulated separately from the *Book of Laws*.³¹ Like Scholarios, Kamariotes believed that Plethon had had some success in propagating his pagan beliefs, for he spoke of 'certain others who shared Plethon's corruption and voluntarily adopted the depravity of which he was the source'.³²

²⁵ Scholarios, iv. 477. 38-9.

²⁶ Ibid. 477. 2; Masai (1956), 304.

²⁷ S. Fassoulakis, *The Byzantine Family of Raoul Ral(l)es* (Athens 1973), 76 n. 1.

²⁸ Scholarios, iv. 155-6.

²⁹ Ibid. 114. 19 ff.

³⁰ Legrand (1892), 311-2.

³¹ See p. 362 below.

³² Kamariotes, 4.

Trapezuntius went even further, accusing Plethon of trying to convert all mankind to his pagan beliefs. His claim that he was aware of Plethon's heretical notions as long ago as 1439, when they were at Florence together, has already been recorded.³³ He later added that his suspicions were increased by what he heard from Greek emigrants to Italy, but there is no reason to doubt that they already existed in his mind.

With these two may be linked the name of a third critic, Manuel of Corinth (known as Peloponnesius). He belonged to a younger generation, born after Plethon's death, probably about 1460. The relevance at this point of his attack on Plethon, accusing him of 'secretly treating Christian doctrine with contempt and trying to establish the vile pagan doctrine of false gods', is that he based his judgement specifically on the *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*.³⁴ He thus supports the view of Scholarios that to an Orthodox theologian Plethon's treatise should have been suspect from the first. Even the qualified commendation expressed by Scholarios at the time would have seemed to Manuel to be overgenerous.

It is against this background that the *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine* should be read. Ostensibly it was Plethon's most important contribution to pure theology. The treatise to which he was replying has been identified as an extant work by John Argyropoulos, and not, as was once supposed, a lost work by Bessarion.³⁵ Plethon was therefore dealing with a pro-Unionist who had gone over to the Catholic Church, but one who was also a devotee of his own. (The same would have been true, of course, had it been Bessarion.) Personal friendship did not inhibit him from criticizing the pro-Latin treatise. He may even have felt himself obliged to do so in order to maintain the fiction of his own orthodoxy. But his criticism was not severe, nor did it convey a strong sense of his own commitment to the Orthodox Church.

The *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine* is an essay in logic and political theory as well as theology. It announces an unusual approach almost from the first sentence. The work under review, says Plethon, is based on a principle 'which is very acceptable to Hellenic

³³ Mohler, iii. 340; Legrand (1962), iii. 287; see pp. 168-9 above.

³⁴ PG 160, 789-92, para. 24.

³⁵ Sp. Lambros, *Ἀργυροπούλεια* (Athens 1910), 107-28. See also Masai (1956), 390-1, correcting Alexandre, p. xxviii n. 1.

theology but entirely repugnant to the Church'.³⁶ This principle is that things which have different potentialities must also differ in essence. Hence if the Son did not share in the production of the Spirit—Plethon omits the adjective 'Holy'—he would differ in essence from the Father.

We, the Greeks, he continues, say that the Spirit ranks only third after the Father and the Son, since there are in fact two processions in the case of the Spirit. One is the cause of its substance (*ὑπόστασις*), the other consists in its being sent to us in this world. The latter procession is brought about 'by the Son and through the Son'. So the Spirit ranks after the Son in order of precedence, if not by nature.³⁷

The second procession is confirmed by the words of Christ, of which Plethon gives two examples to show the difference between the procession of the substance and the sending to us.³⁸ The Latins are silent on the second procession because they think it weakens the case for believing that the procession of the substance is from the Son as well as the Father. They try to diminish the significance of the second procession by saying that it took place in time and was not coeternal with the Son of God. If they argue, however, that the creative power in God was not coeternal with him, they cannot claim that the power in the Son to send the Spirit into the world is coeternal with him; and if they argue against the latter, they cannot claim the former. So if the Son has coeternally in himself the power to send the Spirit into the world, he must take precedence of the Spirit. Therefore there is an order of precedence within the Trinity.³⁹

But the postulate that things which differ in their potentialities must also differ in essence is unacceptable to the Church. Pagan theology sets the One God on high above everything, making him one and indivisible, and then gives him numerous offspring, some superior to others but none of them equal to the Father. It calls them gods and children of God, but also works of God, so making them inferior in divinity and essence. This is consistent with the axiom about beings that differ in their potentialities differing also in essence. But the Church cannot accept it, because it would make the Son neither equal to the Father nor of the same essence. The Father would exist in and through himself, but the Son only through the Father, which would make them different in potentiality. The Latins must not link their 'reckless innovation' with such heresy.⁴⁰

The Church postulates one essence of the Father, Son, and Spirit:

³⁶ PG 160, 975 A.

³⁷ Ibid. 975 B-C.

³⁸ Ibid. 975 C.

³⁹ Ibid. 976 A.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 976 B-D.

three persons, each distinguished by his properties. Some properties are common to all three. These include their essence and nature, the creation of the universe, providence, the origin of all things, and so on. But some are not common to all. Causation, for example, is common to only two of them, and is not equal even as between those two. It belongs to the Father in relation to generation, but to the Son only in relation to procession. In other words, God can create, but the Son can only cause something to proceed. The Latins must recognize this distinction: nothing can cause itself to proceed, but that which is caused to proceed must be distinct from that which causes it to do so. They fail to understand the consequences of their argument that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in a single act of production.⁴¹

If the Father and the Son cause the Spirit to proceed in a single act of production by virtue of their common essence (as the treatise under review maintains), then either the Spirit will produce itself, having a common essence with them; or, if it is distinct from them in the act of production, it will end up with a different essence. It cannot therefore be of one substance with the Father and the Son if they produce it by virtue of their common essence and not as individual persons. For in that case it will be their common essence which produces the Spirit, so that it would clearly end up as 'a distinct essence and a distinct god'.⁴²

But if the production is by the Father and the Son personally, then it cannot be a single act of production, unless there is a merger of the two persons. So there must be two processions and a division in the nature of the Spirit. This raises the danger of making the Trinity into a Tetrad. On the other hand, if there is a merger of the two persons, Father and Son, in producing the Spirit personally, then the Trinity is reduced to a Dyad. These arguments convict the Latins of either the Sabellian or the Macedonian heresy. They can no more escape it than they can deny that twice five is ten.⁴³

There are further errors in the treatise on the Latin doctrine. It says that God, in creating the Son, gave him the power of creation, and in producing the Spirit gave it the power of production; yet it does not call the Son creative, nor the Spirit productive. Either the Latins are contradicting themselves or they are trying to trick us. Furthermore,

⁴¹ Ibid. 977 A-B.

⁴² Ibid. 977 C.

⁴³ Ibid. 977 C-8 B. Sabellius (3rd c.) adhered to the Monarchian heresy, emphasizing the absolute unity of the deity; Macedonius (4th c.) to the Homoiousian heresy, making the Son not consubstantial but only of like substance with the Father.

they have accused us of 'obelizing the words of the Saints' (that is, marking passages as spurious), or of forging, rejecting, or misinterpreting them. These are charges to which they are much more vulnerable themselves.⁴⁴

Plethon gives a number of instances of Greek patristic writers who were questioned by the Latins: John of Damascus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Justin Martyr, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Cyril of Alexandria. It is in fact much easier for the Greeks than for the Latins to prove the consistency of their Fathers of the Church, especially with regard to the procession of the Spirit.⁴⁵ He ends the theological part of his argument with a quotation from the Gospel, to which with characteristic sarcasm he attaches a ridiculous interpretation based on the Latin doctrine.

His quotation is from St John, 7: 38: 'He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' Christ said those words, St John explains, before the Holy Spirit existed, because he had not yet been glorified. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him would receive in future. After quoting the Evangelist's gloss on Christ's words, Plethon proceeds to a gloss of his own. He adds that 'anyone who takes this to refer to the substance of the Holy Spirit might as well say that it proceeds not merely from the Son but even from the belly of the faithful'.⁴⁶

In conclusion he turns away from pure theology. He says that he never feared the Latins' superiority in argument in Italy. It was not in argument that the Greeks were defeated. 'We know how the agreements were reached, and that is why it is not surprising that many of those who agreed did not stand by what they agreed.'⁴⁷ His criticisms are reserved for those who agreed as a matter of mere expediency, which was tantamount to assuming that God exercises no providence over mankind. Plethon fears that many Greeks are thus deluded, since they are doing nothing to mend their ways and propitiate God. So it is not surprising that God has allowed their enemies to increase and multiply, leaving the Greeks to decay in their reduced straits. 'For clearly many of our enemies hold much more firmly than our people in their souls the doctrine that God does have regard for human affairs.'⁴⁸ Though he means the Turks, he does not name them.

No doctrinal error on their part, he adds, can cancel out this faith, nor can the correct doctrine of the Greeks cancel out their lack of

⁴⁴ PG 160, 978 C.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 978 D-9 A.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 979 A.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 979 B.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 980 A.

faith. For this point of belief is crucial: either one sets up God in sovereignty over mankind, or one ejects him altogether. Since time immemorial those races have flourished which have done so with a belief in divine providence; those which have decayed have done so in rejection of that belief. Men's attitudes towards keeping or breaking their oath provide clear proof: those who keep their word flourish, those who break it decay. His last words do not expressly join Scholarios in denouncing the Union, but assert his conviction that it was an irrelevance:

We have no hope of being saved unless we put right whatever great wrong has been done in the sight of God, whether it be one thing or many, whether in doctrines or deeds. Until then we cannot be saved by making agreements with the Latins or with anyone else whatsoever. God grant that we may choose what is best, not only in this matter but in every other.⁴⁹

Plethon's essay elicited comments from both Bessarion and Scholarios. Bessarion's letter is not extant, but one of his main points can be inferred from Plethon's reply to him, which survives.⁵⁰ He had asked why Plethon never advanced any of his present arguments at the Council of Florence. Plethon gives several reasons. He did not think it right, as a layman, to intervene in a debate among priests. Laymen had in fact been forbidden to do so by 'you people', including both Bessarion and the present Patriarch.

In any case, the anti-Latin arguments were put forward by the Bishop of Ephesus (Mark Eugenikos) 'with complete self-sufficiency', and he was never defeated, only commanded to be silent, 'so that your party could carry out your intentions in default of an adversary'. After a dark reference to 'all your other machinations', Plethon concluded that 'those who agreed at the Council showed that they did so not because they were convinced in argument, by anathematizing what they had agreed when they returned here: all but a very few, about whom I refrain from expressing our opinion out of regard for yourself'.

Scholarios' comments, which survive, were quite different.⁵¹ Scholarios was satisfied with the hostile attitude which Plethon had taken up towards the Latin doctrine, but he had a strong suspicion already that Plethon's hostility was really directed against Christianity as such, whether Catholic or Orthodox. He also still had a grievance against Plethon over their earlier controversy about the respective merits of Plato and Aristotle, aggravated by Plethon's failure to send him a copy of his *Reply to the Defence of Aristotle*.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 980 B-C

⁵⁰ Alexandre, 311-12.

⁵¹ Scholarios, iv. 118-51.

He further suspected that Plethon's devotion to Plato, particularly the Neoplatonic form in which it was dressed, was only a cover for an anti-Christian and pagan theology. This suspicion was justified by the text of the *Book of Laws*, but Scholarios had not yet seen it in full. He therefore felt obliged to address Plethon with the respect due to an older man and an eminent scholar. But the latent indignation which he felt often breaks through his language. At the same time he also professed indifference to the debate on Plato and Aristotle, no doubt because he had recently entered monastic life as the 'humble monk Gennadios', which made it inappropriate for him to engage in a purely secular controversy.

'Best and wisest of friends,' Scholarios' letter to Plethon begins, 'I received your letter in which you said that you love me, and that you were neither angry nor seeking to cause anger; and that you had sent to our divine monarch a work in reply to what I once argued in defence of Aristotle. Immediately afterwards, too, a work of yours against the Latins appeared, which you did not mention to us, so that you again seemed to be angry.'⁵²

Plethon's letter in question is not extant, but the state of relations between the two men is readily apparent. Complaint follows upon the initial courtesy, and sarcasm upon complaint. The Emperor Constantine, to whom Plethon had sent his *Reply* because Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle* had been addressed to him, had refused to let Scholarios see the *Reply*. His reason was, according to Scholarios, 'I should imagine in order to spare your reputation'. But Scholarios knows that the *Reply* has fallen into the hands of others. Its quality, he says ironically, requires that it should be published and not concealed. He hopes that perhaps someone will let him see a copy, 'thinking to give me either pleasure or pain, according to the knowledge he has of these matters and his opinion of myself'.⁵³

Scholarios expresses surprise at Plethon's choice of people to champion, 'because I always held you in high esteem, especially for your wisdom and skill in argument'. He promises not to counter-attack, because he is grateful for Plethon's attack on the Latin doctrine. Whether Plato is superior to Aristotle is a question of little importance compared with the preservation of 'our traditional faith', which is now under attack from men inclined to impiety, as Plethon has said.⁵⁴

⁵² Scholarios, iv. 118. 30-119. 1.

⁵³ Ibid. 119. 5-17.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 119. 23-121. 8.

Plethon was always on the right side in reality, he concedes, even if some people may have doubted it; and the proof of it is in his new work, the *Reply to the Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*, which must silence his critics. So Scholarios will not pursue the old debate between them. He will even concede that both Plato and Aristotle were talking nonsense, since they had not the benefit of divine revelation. Those who have had that advantage are necessarily superior to Plato and Aristotle, as well as to all the other sources of pagan philosophy, such as Hermes, Apollo, and the Muses.⁵⁵

'We should not be too sorry to see Plato and Aristotle cancel each other out.'⁵⁶ Some are inclined to forgive them simply because they did not enjoy Christian revelation. But this should not be allowed to justify attempts to revive 'the corrupt nonsense of the Hellenes'. That is why Scholarios is so pleased that Plethon has exposed their nonsense as well as that of the Latins. 'For there is no room any longer for those who slander your soul and assert that you hold views which it is plainly evident that you regard with contempt.'⁵⁷

Scholarios can imagine, he says, the angry protests of both Plato and Aristotle against Plethon; but Plethon can reply that he honours them where honour is due and condemns them where they are at fault. Their essential fault is the same as that of the Latins. It lies in the failure to distinguish between God's essence (*οὐσία*) and his activity (*ἐνέργεια*). This has led the Latins to believe that the offspring of God are produced from his essence, being one with his activity, yet are not identical in nature with him but are different and inferior essences.⁵⁸

At this point Scholarios' argument divides into separate attacks on the Hellenes and the Latins. He repudiates the notion held by some that the ancient Greeks anticipated the doctrine of the Trinity, saying that 'the Good and mind and soul are the original substances and the three connected causes of existing things'.⁵⁹ He also denounces the multiplicity of gods in 'Hellenic theology', arguing that this diminishes the divine nature by establishing an order of precedence, so that Apollo, for example, is superior to Hermes. The polytheists regard the sun and the moon as gods, instead of works of God. They invent gods for every kind of function. They distinguish the roles of male and female. They place some gods in charge of the good things and some over the worse things that happen in nature, though the latter are really caused by men themselves. They make some men into gods and

⁵⁵ Ibid. 121. 10-122. 10.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 125. 9-10.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 125. 12-126. 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 126. 2-30.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 131. 12-16.

others into stars; and there is 'no end to the absurdities they fabricate, as if deliberately to expel the perfection and simplicity and self-sufficiency of God, and his infinitude and dispassionateness and omnipotence and providence'.⁶⁰

This tirade is on the face of it a straightforward repudiation of ancient Greek religion. But since that was as well known to Plethon as to Scholarios, there must have been some special reason for dilating on it at length. The reason can only be that a movement was afoot to revive these ideas, and that Scholarios had reason to believe Plethon to be associated with it. Still, he had to pretend to acquit Plethon of such blasphemy in the light of his latest publication.

So, after elaborating on the illogicality of such antiquarian, or in their modern guise, Neoplatonic notions, Scholarios concludes: 'So this is what you would say to them, O best of men, and other things even better but similar in intent, showing how great is the difference between Hellenic superstition and our theology.'⁶¹ God has given many signs to show how detestable to him are those who adhere to 'the Hellenic doctrine', which Scholarios compares with Arianism.⁶² Plethon has done well to attack it; 'and for that, or for your struggle against the Latins, I am now and ever shall be grateful'.⁶³

The Latins, indeed, have reason themselves to be grateful to Plethon for giving them the opportunity to benefit from his excellent arguments. They should now learn to treat with contempt a doctrine which runs the risk of 'bringing back after a long absence some kind of Arian or Hellenic heresy'.⁶⁴ The doctrine that the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father must be absolutely rejected.⁶⁵ Plethon has rightly accepted that there must be an order within the Trinity, by which the Son is counted before the Spirit: that is unavoidable, but not in the way the Latins postulate.⁶⁶ In sending forth the Holy Spirit and thereby gaining some degree of honour, as the Latins contend, the Son 'would not reasonably be thought by accurate commentators to have been placed ahead of the Spirit, although this point has escaped your wisdom, I know not how; for the argument will provide our opponents with no small handle'.⁶⁷ Thus Scholarios contrives to praise and criticize Plethon in the same breath.

A long passage follows in which Scholarios invokes a succession of patristic writers, beginning with Augustine and Cyril, against the

⁶⁰ Scholarios iv. 131. 34-133. 28.

⁶² Ibid. 134. 35-135. 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 137. 35-138. 7.

⁶³ Ibid. 137. 22-5.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 138. 38-139. 2.

⁶¹ Ibid. 134. 27-9.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 137. 25-9.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 139. 7-11.

Latin doctrine.⁶⁸ Finally, coming back to the errors of what he calls the 'Church of the Romans'⁶⁹ (that is, the Latins), Scholarios reminds himself that it is Plethon whom he is addressing. 'To all these errors, best of men, you have opposed your wisdom, as you have always done in the past and now more opportunely than ever and with much success.'⁷⁰ For this Christ's inspiration is to be thanked.

He refers again obliquely to their controversy over Plato and Aristotle, which he says was the only occasion in his life when he was ever offensive to anyone. He then compounds the offence by regretting that Plethon 'had been prompted, after reaching the age of Tithonos, to utter not so much puerilities as irrelevances; for it is enough so to describe them, and you will forgive me for saying just so much in response to your many arguments from every side'.⁷¹ He ends with a promise not to counter-attack Plethon's *Reply* to his own *Defence of Aristotle*, for he has learned to be as forbearing as Socrates towards personal attacks.⁷²

Some years later, after Plethon's death, Scholarios returned to the subject. Writing to the Exarch Joseph, he said that the 'national disaster' had prevented him from composing a counter-attack on Plethon's *Reply* to his *Defence of Aristotle*, apart from this letter.⁷³ There is no inconsistency here with his statement in the letter to Plethon that he had not yet even seen the *Reply*, which was sent only to Constantine; for although the letter to Plethon touches on some points in the earlier controversy, it is not in any formal sense a counter reply. It was, however, full of covert menace, as Scholarios admitted to the Exarch. He had heard that Plethon was very upset by it, 'and gave up hope that his ideal system of laws would ever prove effective after this, since we would outlive him and could nullify it either in the flames or by the pen, whichever we might choose'.⁷⁴ In other words, Scholarios' letter to Plethon was really aimed at what he had heard of the *Book of Laws*.

The veneer of courtesy and congratulation did little to conceal his real hostility. He found it impossible to doubt that Plethon was in fact guilty of paganism, polytheism, and heresy: in a word which did not yet exist, of Neoplatonism. The excerpts from the *Laws* which were already in circulation pointed to that conclusion. So did the affair of Juvenal, at least in Scholarios' estimation. So did even the *Reply to the*

⁶⁸ Ibid. 139-48.

⁷¹ Ibid. 150. 30-3.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 156. 21-4.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 149. 13.

⁷² Ibid. 151. 6-12.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 149. 23-4.

⁷³ Ibid. 156. 15-18.

Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine; and so, not least, did the *Reply* to Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle*, at whatever date it eventually came into Scholarios' hands.

The *Reply* to the *Defence of Aristotle* is about two and a half times as long as its predecessor, *De Differentiis*, but still very much shorter than Scholarios' treatise. The *Reply* deals specifically with thirty-three of Scholarios' criticisms, all of which fall within the first two-thirds of *De Differentiis*. The text of the *Reply* was first published in western Europe from a defective manuscript, which had the effect of distorting the order of the points examined.⁷⁵ The correct order, which is restored in the following chapter, could be deduced from a comparison with Scholarios' own treatise, and it has been confirmed by the discovery of two manuscripts in the Library of San Marco.

One of the manuscripts (Marcianus gr. Cl. IV 31 (1316)) consists of a manuscript of Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle* with the original draft of Plethon's comments written round the margins: in other words, it is the copy which Michael Apostoles clandestinely obtained for Plethon. The other (Marcianus 517) contains Plethon's autograph of the *Reply*, closely following the original draft. There is therefore no doubt of its authenticity.⁷⁶

As with the *Defence of Aristotle*, it would be tedious to reproduce the argument of the *Reply* in its entirety. A summary will suffice, with verbatim quotations in inverted commas. It will be seen in the following chapter that the *Reply* is polemical in tone and full of sarcasm and abuse. This can only be excused on the ground that Scholarios was the first to be guilty of writing in such a manner. It will also be seen that, for the first time in these exchanges, Plethon addresses his adversary in the second person singular. But he did not send a copy to Scholarios, only to Constantine.⁷⁷ In the contest of discourtesy, Plethon now decidedly took the lead.

The formal title of his *Reply* is: 'On the Observations of George Scholarios in Defence of Aristotle'. In the summary following in Chapter XV the numbered paragraphs correspond to the principal points made by Scholarios, which are similarly numbered in Chapter XIII. In each case Plethon prefaces his reply with a sentence or paragraph quoted 'verbatim' from Scholarios' text. These quotations are numbered from 1 to 33.

⁷⁵ The defective text was published by W. Gass in *Gennadius und Plethon*, ii (Breslau 1844), 54-116; reprinted in PG 160, 979-1020.

⁷⁶ Masai (1954), 540-2.

⁷⁷ Scholarios, iv. 118. 30 ff.

XV

PLETHON'S REPLY

1. YOU (Scholarios) complained that 'the book containing blasphemies against Aristotle' only recently came into your hands.¹ On the contrary, I sent you a copy as soon as it was requested. You, on the other hand, had persistently delayed sending me a copy of your *Defence of Aristotle* in spite of many requests. You even pretended to have sent me a copy when in fact you had not done so: 'for along with your other faults, lying comes naturally to you'. Even the text which reached me by clandestine means was incomplete, but it was 'enough to display your ignorance and intellectual decrepitude'.²

2. You claimed that 'some say Aristotle's difference from Plato was only a superficial matter of vocabulary'.³ Only Simplicius says that, and he says it only in the context of criticism of the Church for its interminable disputes about theology, which he contrasts with the fundamental unity of Greek philosophy. Even so, his view differs from that of both Proclus and Plotinus. Simplicius' criticism of the Church is really applicable to yourself, 'since you are often in a state of schism within yourself'.⁴

3-4. You claimed that philosophers in the West, whom you and I met at the Council, were mostly Aristotelians rather than Platonists, and that the latter came off worst in their debates.⁵ The fact is that in Italy you conspicuously avoided the company of reputable philosophers. The best of the western philosophers acknowledged their inferiority in comparison with the Greeks, and tried to learn from us. Examples were Peter of Calabria, who knew Greek as well as Latin, and Ugo (Benzi), who once admitted that the Greek interpretation of a disputed passage in Aristotle was preferable to that of the Latins. Naturally those who knew Plato only through Aristotle's misrepresentation of him could not fairly judge between the two. But those who had had a taste of Plato greatly prefer him to Aristotle.⁶

¹ PG 160, 979 D; Scholarios, iv. 1. 8-9.

² PG 160, 981 A.

³ Scholarios, iv. 3. 11-13. Simplicius often makes this point: see for example *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vii, ed. I. L. Heiberg (Berlin 1894), 640. 27 ff., on *De Caelo*, iii. 306^a1; and *ibid.* x, ed. H. Diels (Berlin 1895), 1249. 12-13, on *Physics*, viii. 258^b4.

⁴ PG 160, 981 B-C.

⁵ Scholarios, iv. 4. 2-6; 11-14.

⁶ PG 160, 981 C-2 C.

5. Your reference to Averroes also contains a misrepresentation of my argument.⁷ (Plethon had quoted Averroes' doctrine, deduced from Aristotle, that the human soul (*ψυχή*) is mortal (XI. 1). Scholarios had misquoted Plethon, substituting mind (*νοῦς*) for soul. Aristotle in fact distinguished mind from soul: mind is the immortal part of the soul, but the residue is mortal.⁸) You say that according to the Latins and Jews, Averroes did not regard the human mind as mortal. I too learned of Averroes' views on the human soul from 'the better Italian philosophers and certain Jews'; and I recognize that there is some sense in his argument. But you were either listening to complete fools or did not understand what you heard.⁹

6. It is your contention that Aristotle was closer than Plato to the doctrines of the Christian Church.¹⁰ You have produced no evidence to support this view. The early Fathers of the Church took the opposite view. Cyril, for example, chose Plato rather than Aristotle to support his argument 'to prove the Church consistent with Greek philosophy'. And we know of another one who 'ridicules Aristotle's trifling on the subject of Providence'. It is an insult to the Church to claim that Aristotle's doctrine of Providence is closer to it than Plato's brilliant lucidity on that subject. Your vanity in considering yourself a better authority on theology than such men as these is unpardonable.¹¹

7. It is your contention that, but for Aristotle, men would never have had 'natural philosophy'.¹² I do not belittle Aristotle's scientific works: I encourage people to read them. But we do not have to venerate everything he wrote, including the errors. Nor should we suppose that Plato was ignorant of the sciences merely because he did not write about them. Like the Pythagoreans before him, he preferred to communicate these subjects orally to his pupils, 'since they would be wiser if they had the sciences in their souls rather than in books'.¹³

Plato's philosophy came down to him from Zoroaster by way of the Pythagoreans. Zoroaster, who lived 5,000 years before the Trojan War according to Plutarch,¹⁴ was the oldest of the so-called philosophers and law-givers except Min of Egypt; and even the Egyptians were converted from Min's doctrines by the influence of Pythagoras. Plato also adopted the Zoroastrian doctrine: 'the surviving oracles of Zoroaster

⁷ Scholarios, iv. 4. 21-5.

⁹ PG 160, 982 C-3 A.

¹¹ PG 160, 983 A-B.

¹³ PG 160, 983 D.

⁸ *Met.* xii. 1070^a24-6.

¹⁰ Scholarios, iv. 4. 32-4.

¹² Scholarios, iv. 5. 11-13.

¹⁴ *De Iside et Osiride*, xlvi. 369 E.

are clearly consistent with the doctrines of Plato, totally and in every respect'.¹⁵

But the main point is that Plato did not write it all down. His pupils had to pick it up from his lectures, helped if necessary by a 'written memorandum'.¹⁶ Aristotle, wanting to be the leader of a sect of his own and not merely Plato's pupil, perverted the written doctrines of Platonism and adopted the oral doctrines as his own, though often misunderstanding them. He tried to dazzle inferior minds by the sheer mass of his writings. But that is not philosophy, 'for philosophy consists in few words on few subjects: it is about the principles of being, which, if a man has thoroughly grasped them, enable him to discern accurately everything else that can come to men's knowledge'. Aristotle, on the other hand, has been shown to be mistaken by many people, myself among others, 'not in every respect but certainly in the most important ones'.¹⁷

Since you have decided to take issue, we shall continue to defend Plato and ourselves without regard to your threats and abuse. We regard you not as a Gorgon but a Mormon [bugbear], 'capable of frightening children but not grown men who are above insults'. It would be contemptible to take any notice of a man who has 'no shame in boasting about the influence of a wretched woman—and a little tart at that'.¹⁸ We shall continue to maintain our argument, though not at your interminable length, and to expose your errors. As for the rest of 'your empty boasting about yourself and your abuse of ourselves, which leave us cold, it shall be left to others to treat them with derision'.¹⁹

8. You say that Aristotle's obscurity is the mark of a true philosopher, whereas Plato's colourful language is that of a poet, 'not to say some lower occupation'.²⁰ But how can obscurity be the attribute of a philosopher? It is rather the attribute of an ignorant slave, a sophist, or someone deliberately making his subject unnecessarily difficult. 'The language of myth, however, makes sense.' It is used to convey deep meanings out of human consideration (*φιλανθρωπία*) by Plato as well as by other theologians.²¹ Ordinary people learn with enjoyment from myths, as do philosophers. From obscure language philosophers learn with difficulty, and ordinary people not at all. In any case,

¹⁵ PG 160, 984 B.

¹⁶ Ibid. 983 D.

¹⁷ Ibid. 984 C.

¹⁸ Ibid. 984 D. See p. 312 below.

¹⁹ Ibid. 985 A.

²⁰ Scholarios, iv. 8. 27-9.

²¹ PG 160, 985 B.

Aristotle is not nearly so obscure as you make him out to be, in order to shield him.²²

9. You acknowledge me to be right in saying that Aristotle is only explicit in making God the final cause of movement; but you add that I have failed to show that Aristotle's God is not the final cause of essence and being as well.²³ It is superfluous, however, to demonstrate everything, including what is self-evident to all philosophers—though not to you, 'incapable as you are of achieving even the brains of a sophist'.²⁴ The fact that Aristotle assumes a number of subordinate gods equal to the movements of the heavenly spheres²⁵ shows that his God has no other function but to cause movement. If he believed that the universe was created, he should have proved it by reference to its cause, just as he did in his proof of eternal movement. Actually, he identifies the mortal with the created and vice versa; and the immortal with the uncreated and vice versa.²⁶

'So in attributing to heaven the potentiality of eternal existence, he concludes that it is uncreated and immortal. It is then correct and consistent for him to hold that heaven was not produced by any creator, since if he thought it was so produced, he would have seen that he had achieved nothing. For if heaven had within itself the potentiality of being eternal, then its being uncreated and immortal can only be derived from that potentiality, whereas we would attribute it solely to the first cause. But if heaven has the potentiality of its entire being from an external creator, then to prove this is still inconclusive unless the creator invests the cause with some kind of necessity of creating eternal things, just as he invested it with the necessity of causing eternal motion.' From this and one or two other arguments, 'it is clear that Aristotle believes God to be the cause only of the motion of heaven, not of its essential being'.²⁷

10. You refer to Aristotle's assumption that if creation in time appears impossible, 'then causal creation is also eliminated'; and you quote me as suggesting that 'some Christians' have adopted a similar doctrine from Moses, thereby showing Aristotle to be consistent with Christian doctrine.²⁸ You suppose that by 'some Christians' I refer to yourself. But this could be the case only if you subscribe to Arianism, since it was only the Arians who invoked Aristotle in support of this

²² PG 160, 985 B-C.

²⁴ PG 160, 985 D.

²⁶ PG 160, 986 A-B.

²⁸ Scholarios, iv. 11. 13-16. The suggestion is not made in *De Differentiis*: see ch. XIII, n. 22.

²³ Scholarios, iv. 10. 33-5.

²⁵ *Met.* xii. 1074^a14-22.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 986 B-C.

doctrine. Assuming you to be orthodox, it is impossible that I could have been referring to you. Indeed, I regard this doctrine as wholly contrary to that of the Church.²⁹ 'For if it were once granted that everything which owes its existence to a cause must also have had a beginning in time, then it would necessarily follow that the Son and the Spirit, having the Father as cause, must also have had a beginning in time. If you put forward this as your own assumption and that of the Church, then in addition to your general ignorance you would indeed appear to be a poor judge of the doctrines which are appropriate to the Church and those which are not.'³⁰ How then can you claim that Aristotle is in this respect consistent with the Church?

11. You say that 'Plethon is reputed to deprecate inspirations and revelations and to call them deception, and to argue in another work that truth is only to be found by human reason through philosophy.'³¹ I do indeed know about inspirations, which reasoned argument should not accept. 'But you know nothing except how to misrepresent and insult.'³²

12. You say that Aristotle could find nothing precise in Plato or other earlier philosophers about the eternity of the universe.³³ This would imply that Aristotle had never read the Pythagorean *Timaeus* of Locri, who said that 'form and matter existed before the universe came into being in theory', thus distinguishing the existence or non-existence of the universe in theory and in practice.³⁴ It would also imply that Aristotle would never have heard anything on the subject in Plato's lectures. Yet even his dialogues are not entirely silent about it. For example, as I pointed out before, in *Timaeus* he says the soul is created by God and in *Phaedrus* he says it is uncreated and immortal. Clearly in the first context he means 'causally created' and in the second he means 'created in time'. This is a distinction which Aristotle failed to grasp.³⁵

If Aristotle had grasped this distinction, he would have challenged Plato on these lines: 'You are right in saying that the universe was created by God, but you are wrong in arguing that it came into existence in time, having previously not existed.' But he did nothing of

²⁹ PG 160, 986 D.

³¹ Scholarios, iv. 16. 33-5.

³³ Scholarios, iv. 20. 6-10.

³⁴ *Timaeus* Locrus, *De Natura Mundi et Animae*, ed. W. Marg (Leiden 1972), 206. 11 (94c). Like Plethon, Scholarios was unaware that this work (attributed to Socrates' interlocutor in Plato's *Timaeus*) was a later fabrication.

³⁵ PG 160, 987 B-8 A.

³⁰ Ibid. 987 A.

³² PG 160, 987 B.

the kind. He criticized Plato for arguing that the universe is not eternal, because on his own theory of eternity this would also eliminate creation by God. At the same time he appropriated to himself the doctrine of the eternity of the universe.³⁶

But in fact Plato clearly did regard the universe as eternal. This is shown by his words in *Timaeus*: 'Time came into existence simultaneously with the universe.'³⁷ Again, he says that 'the creator was himself good, and in him that is good no envy ever arises concerning anything; and being devoid of envy, he wished everything to be, so far as possible, like himself'³⁸—that is to say, eternal. All this is much better expressed by Plato than by Aristotle. The latter, indeed, clearly does not believe that the universe was created by God.³⁹

13. You quote Aristotle as recognizing a divine power in the Christian sense because he says: 'It is reasonable to suppose that there are so many immovable substances; for the assertion of necessity can be left to more powerful minds.'⁴⁰ By this last phrase you understand 'a necessity greater than can be inferred from appearances—that is, a holy and revealed necessity'. But that is not at all what Aristotle meant. The 'more powerful minds' he refers to are those more expert than himself in astronomy. He assumed a number of unmoved substances equal to the movements of the heavenly spheres, 'on the principle of one thing—one cause'; but in fact he was by no means sure about it. Although he thought his view reasonable, he left it to the experts to say whether it was necessarily so. 'That is Aristotle's meaning in this passage; but to judge from your own treatment of it, you have not the slightest understanding of what he says.'⁴¹

14. In rebutting my argument that Aristotle did not think eternal things can have a cause, you quote a passage in the *Physics* where he says that Democritus was right in some cases, but not in others, to refuse to seek 'any first principle of what has always been'.⁴² An example in which he was wrong, according to Aristotle, is the case of the triangle, where it is possible to assign a reason for the eternity of the property that its angles always add up to two right-angles. But this is a spurious example: Aristotle is speaking not of the intrinsic being or essence of the triangle but of a state or condition. The point can be clarified by reference to another passage, where Aristotle speaks of

³⁶ PG 160, 988 A-C.

³⁷ *Timaeus*, 38 B.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 29 E.

³⁹ PG 160, 988 D-9 A.

⁴⁰ Scholarios, iv. 22. 10-13, quoting *Met.* xii. 1074^a15-18.

⁴¹ PG 160, 989 A-B.

⁴² Scholarios, iv. 25. 32-6, quoting *Physics*, viii. 252^a34 ff.

'the unmoved essences serving as causes to the visible aspects of divine beings'.⁴³ He says 'to', not 'of', and the distinction is important. The cause *of* me is the cause of my being, but the cause *to* me is only the cause of my state or condition. You have failed to understand either Aristotle or myself.⁴⁴

It is plain that for Aristotle all eternal beings have no external cause. If you were right in thinking he held the unmoved beings to exist alone in separation, then he would be committed to the view that there is a large number of independent, eternal beings not derived from a single original source. This would be a heterodox view for you to maintain, rather than the Platonic view which makes all things proceed from the one and only God who is set apart on his own. Why then make such a fool of yourself by placing Aristotle above Plato? 'All philosophers agree that Aristotle is extremely perceptive over minor, trivial details, like a bat in the dark, but when confronted with major ideas of the most brilliant kind he is, to use the same simile, as totally blind as that creature in daylight.'⁴⁵

15. You quote Aristotle as arguing that all men who believe in gods agree in assigning the uppermost heaven to the deity, 'the immortal thus being clearly conjoined to the immortal'.⁴⁶ But Aristotle is not here asserting a causal connection. The verb that he uses is not *ἐξαγοράσθαι* (subjoining) but *συναγοράσθαι* (conjoining). Therefore it does not assert a nexus of dependence but a nexus of community. In other words, the true sense of the verb is 'connected with' (conjoined), not 'derived from' (subjoined).⁴⁷

16. You argue further that since Aristotle speaks of God as the *ἀρχή* of existing things, he evidently also regards him as the creator of heaven.⁴⁸ This is a misinterpretation of the word *ἀρχή*, which means not only first principle, source, or origin, but also authority, rule, or power. Aristotle does not compare God to an architect who produces a house but to a general organizing an army.⁴⁹ He has in mind an authority such as that of a ruling power, 'which in no case is the source of being to its subjects, but only of law and order'.⁵⁰

⁴³ *Met.* vi. 1026^a17-18.

⁴⁴ PG 160, 989 C-90 B.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 990 B-C. The simile is taken from *Met.* ii. 993^b9-11.

⁴⁶ Scholarios, iv. 26. 23-8, based on *De Caelo*, i. 270^b6-9.

⁴⁷ PG 160, 990 D-1 A.

⁴⁸ Scholarios, iv. 27. 24-6.

⁴⁹ *Met.* xii. 1075^a14-15.

⁵⁰ PG 160, 991 B. At this point occurs the first disruption of the defective manuscript used by Gass and Migne. The right sequence is resumed at PG 160, 1008 B. See Masai (1956), 407.

17. You assume that if Aristotle regards God as the motive force of the universe, he must also regard God as its creative power.⁵¹ You might as well argue that since the ox provides the motive force of the wagon, it also constructs the wagon. You have misunderstood the meaning of the verb 'to make'. To make movement does not mean to make in the sense of to create. The counterpart of the one who does the making, in the context of movement or change, is the one who takes or receives it. But in the context of creation, the counterpart of the maker is the thing made or created.

"Thus when the sun generates or promotes the growth of grass from the earth, it may be said to make or create the grass; but when it warms the earth, it could not be said to be making the earth but only making or doing something to it."⁵² So Aristotle regards God, when he moves the heavens, as doing something to them but not as making them. 'Do not imagine that anyone capable of detecting sophistry will be taken in by your blunders.'⁵³

18. You argue that Plato and Aristotle were not far apart in believing that 'the single animate being' which moves the universe is also the cause of the unity of all things; except that Aristotle identifies this force with God, and Plato identifies it with the Forms. But you ask 'how can the Forms be responsible for the unity of things if that which causes motion is the cause of that unity, since there is no reason why the Forms should be responsible for motion?'⁵⁴

In fact this is a further proof that Aristotle did not regard God as the creator of the universe, 'if he says that that which moves things, and not that which makes them, is the cause of unity in things'.⁵⁵ Even if the mover and the maker are identified, it is *qua* maker and not *qua* mover that it is responsible for unity. It is because Aristotle was doubtful whether God is the creator as well as the mover of the universe that he attributed its unity only to the mover. Even if God is responsible for the unity of things, it does not follow that he is the cause of their being, any more than a king who imposes order and unity on his people is the cause of their existence.⁵⁶

19. Given that Aristotle regarded the heavenly bodies as responsible not only for the movement of other things but also for their existence, you argue that it is hard to believe he regarded that which moves the heavenly bodies themselves as responsible only for their motion.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Scholarios, iv. 28. 20-3.

⁵² PG 160, 1008 C.

⁵³ Ibid. 1008 D.

⁵⁴ Scholarios, iv. 29. 3-5.

⁵⁵ PG 160, 1009 A.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 1009 B.

⁵⁷ Scholarios, iv. 30. 17-20.

I would say, on the contrary, that 'it is even harder to believe that Aristotle, while regarding God as the creator of heaven, nevertheless nowhere mentioned the fact'.⁵⁸ You say that although, for some reason, he abjured the word 'creator' (*δημιουργός*), which was used by Plato—a much more accurate Greek philologist—he did not abjure the concept. Yet he used the word 'maker' (*ποιητής*), which Plato also used; and he used the word 'Father', which Plato and the Zoroastrians also applied to God.⁵⁹

Is it not apparent that Aristotle deliberately avoided any word which would imply recognition of God as the cause of the universe's being? He called God a Principle, and even a First Principle, but only as one among many. Such language is inappropriate to a God who is king of all and must be, as Plato and Zoroaster make him, altogether unique and not to be numbered among other gods. 'What you call hard to believe of Aristotle is not so much hard as inescapable, in the case of a man who supposes that there is no generation of eternal beings.'⁶⁰

20. You quote Aristotle as saying that 'among eternal things nothing can occur spontaneously or automatically (*ἀπὸ ταῦτομάτου*), but only from some cause'.⁶¹ In fact Aristotle called 'automatic' what occurs or exists without purpose, using the word in its strict etymological sense.⁶² Since he believed that eternal beings are moved and ordered for a purpose, he naturally rejected automatism in their case.⁶³

21. According to you, Aristotle held that if the first principle were eliminated, order would be eliminated also; and if order were eliminated, generation would be also. It would follow that Aristotle believed that the first principle, which is God, originates both the order and the generation, and therefore the existence, of the heavenly bodies and of all that is created and perishes.⁶⁴ But in fact Aristotle's words refute your own argument. If he regarded God as the creator, he would not say that if the first principle were eliminated, order would be also. He would say rather that heaven and the heavenly spheres, and even the whole universe and the eternal substances, would be eliminated; and he would say that if they were eliminated, rather than if order were eliminated, then generation would be also. So is it not clear once again that Aristotle did not regard God as the creator of the universe?⁶⁵

⁵⁸ PG 160, 1009 C.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 1009 D.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 1010 A-B.

⁶¹ Scholarios, iv. 30. 36-7, quoting *De Caelo*, ii. 287^b24-7.

⁶² Plethon followed Aristotle, *Physics*, ii. 197^b29-30, in deriving *αὐτόματος* from *αὐτός* (self) and *μάτην* (without purpose). See p. 44 above.

⁶³ PG 160, 1010 B.

⁶⁴ Scholarios, iv. 37. 7-14.

⁶⁵ PG 160, 1010 C-D.

'I find it amazing of you, when I observe that you fail to understand most of the passages which you produce from Aristotle to refute us, and which expose how little understanding you have of Aristotle. It makes me smile to hear you having the temerity to write commentaries on him. If you take my advice about them, you will commit any that you have so far written to the flames, and refrain from embarking on any new ones you may contemplate. Otherwise you will become a laughing-stock with everyone you meet, making a fool of yourself in matters which you do not understand; for I can detect no intellectual capacity in you, and your mental faculties are exceedingly obtuse.'⁶⁶

22. You put forward the suggestion that Aristotle may have spoken of the first principle as the creator of the universe in some lost passage of the *Metaphysics*.⁶⁷ You have picked up a characteristic theme of the Jews, who take refuge in the unknown when they cannot demonstrate that theirs is the ruling principle of the known world, and say that some ruling principle of the world and kingdom of the Jews must exist somewhere.⁶⁸ Being unable to find what you want in Aristotle, you invoke various irrelevant passages of Thomas (Aquinas). Then you claim to have achieved what you have entirely failed to do, and 'like an ill-bred cock, as Plato puts it, crowing as if it had won instead of being beaten, you hop off from the argument and end up inventing some lost books of Aristotle to take refuge in, assuming that Aristotle must have said something relevant to this notion you are so keen on'. The fact is that as he did not say anything of the sort in his surviving works, although there were many points at which it would have been relevant to do so, the presumption is that he did not say it in any of your imaginary passages either.⁶⁹

23. You argue that it is ridiculous to condemn Aristotle not for what he says erroneously but for what he does not say at all, either affirmatively or negatively.⁷⁰ But it is wrong to speak loosely of affirmation and negation as if they were on all fours, 'for with a negation went fear of the hemlock, since most of the Hellenes believed that God was the creator of heaven'.⁷¹ There are many examples of that fear: Aristides the son of Eudaimon felt obliged to assert both the creation and the eternity of the universe; Pericles was at risk when Anaxagoras was impeached for impiety; and Socrates was put to death. Some license

⁶⁶ PG 160, 1010 D-II A.

⁶⁷ Scholarios, iv. 38. 1-3. Scholarios went on to say that he did not rely on any such assumption, though others did.

⁶⁸ PG 160, 1011 B.

⁷⁰ Scholarios, iv. 38. 38-39. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 1011 B-C.

⁷¹ PG 160, 1011 D.

was allowed to poets, going back to Orpheus, but none to philosophers.⁷²

'Thus it was unsafe for Aristotle to deny the creation of heaven by God; but what could have prevented him from affirming it, except that he did not recognize it?'⁷³ Why should he torment us with interminable details about seed and embryos and shellfish without ever mentioning the sublimest of all doctrines? My own view is that he was not simply silent about creation but used phrases which clearly imply that he disbelieved in it. You make yourself ridiculous by your defence of Aristotle for leaving unsaid what he ought to have said, as in the Pythagorean poem:

Do not let sleep fall on your tender eyelids
Till you have thrice gone over each of these questions on your daily tasks:
Wherein have I failed? What have I achieved? What have I left undone
that I ought to have done?⁷⁴

24. You quote Aristotle's view that 'it is absurd, indeed an impossibility, to suppose the generation of eternal entities'; and you argue that this was directed only against the Pythagorean belief that numbers were generated in time.⁷⁵ But Aristotle cannot have intended to attribute to the Pythagoreans a contradictory belief that numbers are both eternal and created in time. His meaning is simply that geometers postulate the generation of figures for purely theoretical purposes. They say that the sphere is generated by the revolution of a semi-circle in order to theorize about the sphere, not because they think the semi-circle causally creates the sphere or exists in time before it. Having said this, he criticized the Pythagoreans for believing that numbers have a nature and reality of their own, instead of being pure abstractions. Such independent reality is what he denied both of numbers and of the Platonic Forms.⁷⁶

Everyone would agree that whatever comes into existence does so from a state of non-existence. But non-existence can be conceived as either potential or actual: that is to say, there are things which are capable either of being or of not-being, and there are things which are not capable of being at all. Normally those who believe in the creation of eternal things regard them as coming into existence from a state of potential non-existence. That is the Pythagorean view, for example,

⁷² Ibid. 1012 A-B.

⁷³ Ibid. 1012 B.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 1012 C-13 A, quoting the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, 40-2.

⁷⁵ Scholarios, iv. 42. 10 ff., quoting *Met.* xiv. 1091^a12-13.

⁷⁶ PG 160, 1013 A-14 B.

and it is Plato's view of the subordinate, created gods. But Aristotle attacked this view. He did not accept the theory of creation from potential non-existence.⁷⁷ He insisted that creation must be out of an actual state of non-existence. When he sought to prove the eternity of heaven, he did so simply by attributing to it the potentiality of possessing eternal being. That is equivalent to denying that it is created. It is thus absolutely clear, whatever you may say to the contrary, that Aristotle did not regard God as the creator, maker, or cause of the being of the universe.⁷⁸

25. In defending Aristotle's doctrine of the equivocality of 'being', you argue that it is not necessary for all things to share being in a univocal sense.⁷⁹ God is the first principle, so you say, in which they all share; he is their unifying principle, and there is no need for any other common character in all things, namely 'being'. But Aristotle's rule is 'one thing, one cause'. For example, he postulates different causes for each of the different movements of the heavenly bodies. If he regarded everything as produced from a single cause, he would have to reduce everything to a single kind, in order to be consistent with his rule. But he does not do so, because he does not regard everything as produced from a single cause. We on the other hand, hold that all things were produced by the one God, but we do not reduce them all to a single indivisible kind because we do not accept Aristotle's rule of 'one thing, one cause' (though it is not without merit, if carefully used).⁸⁰

You may try to argue that the similarity of the first cause established in existing things serves to unite them. But this will not do. How could this similarity be established in existing things? We would agree that if God simply came upon existing things (which is the implication of the doctrine that he did not create the universe), then he could perhaps find some way of imposing similarity on them. But since we hold that 'it is he himself who confers on all things their being, it is inconceivable that he has not, by virtue of their being, conferred on them in advance their similarity to himself and their unity'.⁸¹ It follows that the concept of being is univocal and not, as Aristotle supposed, equivocal. The point which Aristotle failed to understand is that although every genus is shared equally in a verbal sense by all the species comprised in it, it is not shared equally in reality.⁸²

'Being' is thus a univocal concept but unequally shared.⁸³ It is not

⁷⁷ *Met.* ix. 1050^b16-19; *De Caelo*, i. 280^b14-20; *De Gen. et Corr.* ii. 335^a33 ff.

⁷⁸ PG 160, 1014 C-15 A.

⁷⁹ *Scholarios*, iv. 49. 9-14.

⁸⁰ PG 160, 1015 B-D.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 1015 D-16 A.

⁸² *Ibid.* 1016 A-B.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 1016 B.

predicated equally of rational and irrational animals, since 'irrational life is only an imitation of rational life'. Similarly with immortal and mortal life. Wherever a genus is divided into a more perfect and a less perfect form, the former has more being than the latter, although verbally it is predicated in the same way of both. Aristotle was mistaken in thinking that what is the case in verbal terms must also be the case in reality.⁸⁴

The only cases in which the concept of being could be said to be equivocal are those of 'deprivations, corruptions, and other evils in general'; but these things are not caused by God, and they are rather debasements of being. 'That is all I have to say to you for the present about the non-equivocal use of the term "being". As for the rest of your fatuities, I say no more now but leave it to others, with these as starting-points, to find it easy enough to see through the defects of the rest.'⁸⁵

26. You argue that my criticism of Aristotle's logic would lead to the conclusion that there could be two different negative propositions contradicting a single affirmative proposition.⁸⁶ Your argument rests on the absurd assumption that in saying 'It is not a white man' one may in fact be referring not to a man at all but to a piece of wood, whether white or not. But who would ever imagine that such a statement was intended to be a statement about a stick or a stone, or even an elephant? To say that a stick is not a white man is just as silly as to say 'No white man is an elephant'. Propositions must be validated in terms of what they say, not of what they do not say. What you call the 'pith' of Aristotle is not even worthy to be called the rind. I did not think the point even worth mentioning in my *De Differentiis*, which was only intended to demonstrate the superiority of Plato to Aristotle.⁸⁷

(There follows a brief digression on the circumstances in which *De Differentiis* was written. 'That work was not composed as a result of thorough research, as you know yourself, but at a time when I had been ill at Florence and was unable for several days to leave the house where I was staying. Perhaps, too, I was bored and trying at one and the same time to relieve my boredom and to do a favour to those who were interested in Plato. So I wrote the essay in the briefest form, and I now offer you this present work in response to your own loquacity,

⁸⁴ Ibid. 1016 B-C.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 1016 D. The next point on which Plethon comments follows only after a considerable gap in Scholarios' *Defence of Aristotle* (from iv. 56. 8 to iv. 71. 33), owing to the defective version which Plethon received. See p. 253 above.

⁸⁶ Scholarios, iv. 73. 29-35.

⁸⁷ PG 160, 1017 A-C.

since I am incapable of your kind of egurgitation and only capable of expressing myself precisely. So much by way of reply to your criticisms of my brevity.⁸⁸ The argument then reverts to the point of logic which was in dispute.)

In any case, how can you argue that if 'It is not a white man' and 'No one is a white man' mean the same thing, then there will be two negative propositions opposed to a single contrary one? If the two propositions mean one and the same thing, why not call them a single negative proposition? 'But so far as that goes, I have no time to devote to all your blunders: let us go on to your nonsensical remarks about the soul.'⁸⁹

27. You deny that Aristotle believed the human mind to have existed prior to its union with the human body. According to you, his view was that the soul is the completion of the body, and mind arises from the being of the soul.⁹⁰ These are points which I have already made, and on which I have criticized Aristotle, so there is little more to be said. His error lies in faulty language rather than in substance: for example, in defining mind as the reasoning part of the soul and in saying that the essence of mind is activity.⁹¹ But what is much worse is your own series of errors. You recognize that Aristotle identifies the created with the mortal and the uncreated with the immortal. You admit that he considers the human mind immortal. Why then do you fail to see that he must have regarded it as uncreated? Consequently it could not, on his view, have come into existence simultaneously with the body. Yet you say you do not believe that Aristotle regarded the human mind as existing prior to the body.⁹²

It would not surprise me if you have also failed to realize that anyone who regards the universe as eternal, and the human soul as immortal, must not only concede that the soul is uncreated in time but also admit the repeated descent of the soul into human bodies. Otherwise the consequence of the unlimited creation of human beings will be an unlimited accumulation of immortal souls, which would be contrary to nature and is expressly said to be impossible by Aristotle himself.⁹³ He argues correctly in this case, though with a brevity which suggests uncertainty, whereas Plato makes the same point forthrightly,

⁸⁸ PG 160, 1017 C-D.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 1018 A. At this point occurs the second disruption of the defective manuscript used by Gass and Migne. The right sequence is resumed at PG 160, 991 B. See Masai (1956), 407.

⁹⁰ Scholarios, iv. 78. 33-8.

⁹² Ibid. 992 A-B.

⁹¹ PG 160, 991 D.

⁹³ *Physics*, iii. 206^a26 ff.

'as befits a philosopher'. You are clearly incapable of refuting Plato's theory of the recurrent descent of the soul into human bodies, because you do not understand his argument and you attribute to him arguments which he never uses. As usual, you are simply making a fool of yourself.⁹⁴

28. You claim that Aristotle is careful to distinguish different branches of knowledge, and not to confuse physics, mathematics, and theology, as Plato does.⁹⁵ But you are simply depreciating one of Plato's merits in praising one of Aristotle's defects. For every discipline needs other disciplines to supplement its own deficiencies. Geometry needs arithmetic, and physics needs theology.⁹⁶ No discipline can dispense with the study of ultimate causes. You have been misled by one of Aristotle's most inept arguments, 'which it is quite possible that he advances only in order to deceive and create mischief'.⁹⁷ In particular, ethics without theology would be a dead study, as indeed Aristotle's *Ethics* is. For example, he said that 'death is the end, and nothing is thought to be any longer either good or bad for the dead'.⁹⁸ He did not even mention the immortality of the soul, because he could not make up his own mind on the subject.

He was equally mistaken in suggesting that even if anything does penetrate to the dead, it must be something 'weak and negligible'.⁹⁹ He did not say whether this is due to their non-existence or to some other condition. He argued from the analogy with a living person, who is unaware of something owing to his absence. But there seems to be no reason why, if the dead are aware of anything, they should not be aware of significant things. Aristotle gave far too little consideration to the immortality of the soul, on which Plato's arguments are so admirable. 'It is not a case of one man on earth and another man in the other world, but one and the same man.' Yet you have the impertinence to prefer Aristotle to Plato, claiming that real philosophers agree with the Peripatetics and only second-rate minds with the Platonists. The fact is that you know nothing of Platonism.¹⁰⁰

'How can you say that the Peripatetics claim that things which are good or bad for the body here on earth are of little significance, when Aristotle attributes such great power to them? He even claims that such of them as are bad constitute an absolute obstacle to man's

⁹⁴ PG 160, 992 C-3 A.

⁹⁶ PG 160, 993 B-C

⁹⁸ *Eth. Nic.* iii. 1115^a26-7.

¹⁰⁰ PG 160, 994 D-5 A.

⁹⁵ Scholarios, iv. 83. 14-22.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 993 D.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* i. 1101^b1-5.

happiness. He asks how an utterly ugly man can ever be happy?¹⁰¹ That is to say, he claims that even if a man's soul has been perfectly cultivated in virtue, the good of the immortal part can be thus totally annihilated by what is bad in the mortal part, in effect comparing things which are simply incomparable. For how can one compare the mortal with the immortal and the wholly finite with the infinite? So you prefer arguments of that kind to those of Plato? Then are you not indeed contemptible and ignorant? Your arguments are plainly replete with total ignorance, and deserve no further comment. I must turn to your next point.¹⁰²

29. It is impossible, you say, to desire contrary things at one and the same time; and therefore you reject the notion of a man being 'half-wicked'.¹⁰³ But you have simply misunderstood me. I merely suggested that a man could have both legitimate and illegitimate desires, but not at the same time. It is also possible to desire things which appertain to different states of mind. You yourself, for example, 'perhaps enjoy discussion, which is a practice of moderation, as well as simultaneously enjoying your own vanity, which is deplorable and tasteless and has nothing in common with moderation; and you seem to be so consumed with your vanity that you will even sacrifice your religious beliefs for it, changing them at every opportunity in whatever direction you think will bring you greater esteem. So you can see from your own case, if no other, that such a thing is possible and how it is possible.'¹⁰⁴

That is what is meant by being 'half-wicked' as distinct from wholly wicked. Such people are either indifferent to the distinction between what should and what should not be desired, or inclined to desire both. Aristotle made the mistake of postulating two vices opposed to each virtue, so that both the half-wicked and the wholly wicked are opposed to the good. To one thing there can only be one opposite. Aristotle was misled by his definition of virtues and vices in terms of means and extremes, whereas he should have defined them in terms of good and bad; or, as you do, in terms of duty and the reverse, though the former definition is better. Aristotle offered no rule on the subject in the *Ethics*, and you suggest that there can be no rule. But those who define duty and the reverse in terms of good and bad also say that the good of man consists in pursuing the divine, for that is how human

¹⁰¹ Loosely based on *Eth. Nic.* vii. 1153^b 14-19.

¹⁰² PG 160, 995 A-B. ¹⁰³ Scholarios, iv. 87. 26-30.

¹⁰⁴ PG 160, 995 B-C.

nature is made perfect.¹⁰⁵ In other words, moral theory must have a religious basis.

Aristotle does actually introduce a 'god-fearing' (*θεοσεβής*) rule of duty, but not in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, only in the *Eudemian Ethics*, and there only towards the end of the book.¹⁰⁶ In this he is consistent with other philosophers but inconsistent with himself. What has his praise of the fear of earthquakes and thunderstorms to do with religion? Anyone who fears anything must think it bad; but how can it be religious to think earthquakes and thunderstorms bad, when God has ordained them? If one does not believe that God created in us a mixture of the mortal and the immortal, how is religion to be sustained? What use to ethics is the fear of earthquakes and thunderstorms? What sort of religion will people have in countries where there are no earthquakes or thunderstorms, or only at long intervals?¹⁰⁷

Plato, on the other hand, places the good in man's immortal part, and requires him to devote the activities of his mortal part to the service of God and the universe. If he is going to be struck by a thunderbolt or earthquake or disease, he will submit uncomplainingly to the will of God. But all this will seem irrelevant to you. It is time to pass to another point.¹⁰⁸

30. You say that Aristotle regarded pleasure as participating in the ultimate good of man because, even if it cannot itself be the ultimate end, it accompanies the achievement of that end. He believed, according to you, that every activity is 'completed by pleasure, in the sense that pleasure follows every activity, but not in the sense that every activity is directed towards pleasure as its particular end'.¹⁰⁹ But how could something which is being completed fail to be directed towards that which completes it? Nothing is completed except by achieving its own particular end. You are incapable of understanding what Aristotle meant, and even more incapable of detecting his error. He was saying that pleasure participates in the end because the end would be incomplete without it, so that either pleasure is the end of human activity or the end is 'something composite'.¹¹⁰ This is obvious from his text, and all Aristotelian experts agree about it. 'They are certainly not stupider than you, for it would be hard to find among serious students of Aristotle anyone stupider than you.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 995 D-6 C.

¹⁰⁶ *Eth. Eud.* viii. 1249^b 13 ff.

¹⁰⁷ PG 160, 996 C-7 B.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 997 B-C.

¹⁰⁹ Scholarios, iv. 93. 9-20, based on *Eth. Nic.* x. 1175^a 19-21.

¹¹⁰ PG 160, 997 C-8 B.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 998 B.

Aristotle was in fact trying to have it both ways, but in the end he took the view that some pleasures are bad by virtue of being pleasures, though this is not true of all pleasures. In this he was mistaken. He ought to have made it clear whether bad pleasures are bad *qua* pleasures, in which case all pleasures would be bad; and again, if any pleasure is good *qua* pleasure, then every pleasure must be good. His major mistake was to say that it is pleasure which 'completes' our activities. Far from calling it a completion, I would deny the presence of pleasure in the completion of anything. I would say that it accompanies the process of reaching completion, but not the state of completion, from which it is entirely absent.¹¹²

I made the same point briefly in *De Differentiis* with reference to our most important activity, speculative thought. But you have evaded the point in your puerile reply, 'failing to understand what a depth of significance lies in this brief example'.¹¹³ Since pleasure accompanies the process but not the state of completion, it cannot be the ultimate end; for our end consists in being complete, not in becoming complete. This means having become and being good in the soul, 'for in every kind of thing the good is the complete'.¹¹⁴

I did not undertake to refute all Aristotle's mistakes but only some of them, and that briefly; and this I have done. 'You, in your extreme ignorance, say that this is pre-eminently the point on which Plato needs defence—why? Apparently you do not appreciate how much more persuasively than Aristotle he gave precedence to wisdom over all other virtues. He even held that there cannot be a single one of the other virtues present where wisdom is absent, and that the highest part of wisdom is speculation and understanding about God on high.'¹¹⁵ Plato is in no danger from a man so unbalanced that, while he placed human happiness in speculative thought, he could nevertheless also argue that ugliness disqualifies us from enjoying such happiness. If he ascribed such power to ugliness, then he ought logically to have attributed the most desirable element in happiness to physical beauty rather than to speculative thought. For if one thing is contrary to another, then the converse is also the case, as Aristotle himself argues.¹¹⁶

31. In supporting Aristotle's theory about the 'fifth element', you argue that 'it is impossible for fire to move in a circle'.¹¹⁷ This argument ignores my other points, but I will put forward a new one in

¹¹² PG 160, 998 C-D.

¹¹³ Ibid. 999 A.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 999 B.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 999 B-C.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 999 D, perhaps based on *Topics*, vi. 142^a26-33.

¹¹⁷ *Scholarios*, iv. 96. 30.

reply. You have overlooked the case of comets, which are plainly flammable and which 'rise and set with the stars and like them move more or less in a circle'.¹¹⁸ Do you imagine that they are held in a material container? If so, it cannot be Aristotle's supposed new material, because comets are destructible and therefore cannot be contained in an indestructible material.

Moreover, it is impossible that they should move in a circle unless their material container does so also. Aristotle evades the dilemma (though you appear to be unaware of it) by conceding that fire can move in a circle, as the case of comets requires, but in this case there is an external source of motion which he attributes to his 'fifth element'. But it is absurd to say that some fire, which is in motion only occasionally, has the source of motion within itself, while fire which is in permanent motion has it only from an external source.¹¹⁹

In any case the supposition is impossible. For if in the case of comets the fire were in circular motion not naturally but under unnatural constraint, it would be subject to two forces: one, its own natural tendency to remain as it is; and secondly, the impetus of the fifth element, tending to produce motion at a similar speed to that of other heavenly bodies.¹²⁰ As a result of these two forces, the comets' fire would fall behind the rest; but 'as it is, we see the comets rise and set at similar speed to the stars. . . . I say at similar speed, not at identical speed, because none of the parts of the revolving sphere moves at identical speed with any other, except for those which are equidistant both from the two poles and from the centre; but all parts of the sphere in this case move at similar speed to each other.'¹²¹ If the only reason for Aristotle's introduction of the fifth element was to account for the difference between movement in a circle (which seems more natural and appropriate in the case of fire) and movement in a straight line, then it is quite unnecessary. In fact, it is not only new (*καινόν*) but nugatory (*κενόν*).¹²²

The stars have no need of a special material of their own, since the common material suffices for them. Why should God upset the natural order in their case, as you and your friend Aristotle suppose? You yourself are so uninstructed in philosophy that you do not even understand Aristotle's distinction between that which is always actual, that which is sometimes potential and sometimes actual, and that which is always potential only. Why should not this distinction apply

¹¹⁸ PG 160, 1000 B-C.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 1000 C-D.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 1000 D.

¹²¹ Ibid. 1001 A.

¹²² Ibid. 1001 B.

to the material of which the stars are constituted? This material could flow into them as they wax and out of them as they wane, the inflow and outflow being exactly balanced so that their bodies are preserved from destructibility.¹²³

You argue against the Platonists that just as the human soul cannot make the human body immortal, so the 'souls of the stars' could not make their bodies indestructible unless they are made of a unique material. But what the Platonists actually suppose is something different. It is that the soul uses 'something physical' similar to itself, a kind of fiery spirit, as an intermediary vehicle between itself and the body, so that there is no direct conjunction between an immortal non-physical thing and a mortal body. The Platonists owe this theory to Zoroastrian tradition; and, rightly or wrongly, John (Philoponus) and Plutarch before him attribute it also to Aristotle. Either way, Aristotle is left with no case for his fifth element.¹²⁴

Aristotle is mistaken again in attributing the heat of the sun to its motion rather than to its nature. You try to rebut my point that the moon gives out no heat, although it moves, by arguing that Aristotle attributes heat not to all motion but only to very rapid motion.¹²⁵ The rapidest motion, however, is not that of the sun but that of the fixed stars. Nor can you take refuge in the argument about the proportions between the speed of the sun and moon and their distance from us. There is, of course, a relation between their respective speeds and their distances from us, but this cannot account for the great disparity in temperature between them. Nor can it account for the fact that the stars do not give out as much heat as the sun.¹²⁶

Our view is that motion is a source of heat, but it is so by reason of friction rather than mere motion. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the sun warms us as a result of the friction generated by its motion, since friction implies contact. So there is no alternative but to conclude that Aristotle was wrong to reject the common opinion of all men, including philosophers, that 'just as the sun exceeds other stars in brightness, so too it exceeds them in intrinsic heat and warms us out of its great superfluity'.¹²⁷

32. In your discussion of the meaning of 'deliberation' in Aristotle, you have again misunderstood him. He uses the word as equivalent to 'calculating' in the general sense, not in the sense of seeking to grasp

¹²³ PG 160, 1001 C-2 A.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 1002 B-C. The attribution to Aristotle seems to be without foundation.

¹²⁵ Scholarios, iv. 99. 19-20.

¹²⁶ PG 160, 1002 D-3 B.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 1003 B-C.

something without prior knowledge of it.¹²⁸ It is generally agreed that nothing which acts for a purpose does so without being led to it by the exercise of mind. Most reasonable men follow Aristotle's predecessors in assuming a divine mind to be 'in charge' of purposeful action by non-rational beings, just as craftsmen are 'in charge' of human artefacts. But those who were inclined to atheism thought that nature acted without purpose. In the light of this conflict of opinion, Aristotle adopted the sophistical expedient of agreeing with one side that nature acts with a purpose but refusing to endow nature with a divine mind. Hence he said that one could not deny that something happens for a purpose merely because one cannot detect a mind 'deliberating' behind it. He even tried to eliminate calculation from the human arts, 'however much you may try to defend him with your fallacious assumption that deliberation relates only to seeking something without prior knowledge of it'.¹²⁹

Aristotle never gives any indication of postulating a divine mind in charge of things that happen in nature. This is clear from his comparison of such things not to the case of someone curing another, as he would do if he thought them subject to a divine mind, but to someone cured by himself. 'Such is Aristotle, making absurd claims and defending them with fallacies; only dazzling those whom he does dazzle with the quantity of his works; and anything in them that has any kind of merit would not be his own but things which he heard from Plato and sophistically appropriated as his own.'¹³⁰ If there is any merit in anything of his own, it is mere triviality, 'because only in that direction has he a keen mind, dim though it is in matters of greater importance'.¹³¹

That purposeful activity implies a mind behind it is clear from the fact that the ends at which things in nature aim are not present right from the beginning but emerge perhaps only at a later stage. An example is the tendril of a vine clinging to another branch.¹³² This is the natural end of the tendril, but it is not present at the first moment of sprouting. So a mind must be presupposed to plan the twining of the vine-tendril round the other branch. Plato made his Forms minds, and regarded everything in nature as subject to

¹²⁸ Scholarios, iv. 102. 3-7. Aristotle says that 'to deliberate' (*βουλευέσθαι*) and 'to calculate' (*λογίζεσθαι*) are the same: *Eth. Nic.* vi. 1139^a12-13. Scholarios substituted 'to conceive' (*διανοεῖσθαι*) for 'to calculate'. Plethon reverts to the word used by Aristotle: PG 160, 1004 A.

¹²⁹ PG 160, 1004 A-C.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 1004 D.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 1005 A.

¹³² *Ibid.* 1005 A-B.

minds.¹³³ Aristotle on the other hand presupposed no kind of mind presiding over nature. 'When you say that I misrepresent Aristotle as an atheist, you are misrepresenting me. I never said, nor do I now, that Aristotle was an atheist, since in general terms he postulated gods presiding over heaven, but I said and I repeat that he inclined towards atheism; and that is true.'¹³⁴

The evidence for it is threefold. First, he did not represent God as the leader among the gods and unique in his divinity, as did Plato and the Zoroastrians: he made them all equal partners. Secondly, he did not regard God, or any of the gods, as the creator of the universe, as do 'all philosophers and most laymen'. Thirdly, he did not postulate any divine mind presiding over things in nature, as do 'the more god-fearing of mankind'. This proves him to have had 'an utterly diseased mind' and to have been inclined towards atheism.¹³⁵

He also rejected Fortune or Divine Providence (which all philosophers and other men of sound judgement identify) from any role in human affairs; or at most he assigned to it a minimal role. His reason was that 'Fortune and what comes from Fortune happens fortuitously, and if we attribute that to God we shall be representing him as a poor judge or an unjust one, which is not proper for God.'¹³⁶ Aristotle thus fails to understand divine justice, which disposes things in perfect accord with total harmony, 'always preferring the good of the whole to that of the part, as is perfectly just'. These are the reasons for rejecting Aristotle's views, and for not being misled by Averroes into accepting them, 'as many are in the West'.¹³⁷

33. You once again misunderstand Aristotle when you discuss his belief that some things come to be without a cause.¹³⁸ You should pay closer attention to the exact meaning which Aristotle attached to words in a particular context. For example, when he said that 'it is absurd to suppose the generation of eternal entities',¹³⁹ you misunderstood him to mean generation in time rather than causal generation. You made a similar mistake in interpreting his use of the word 'deliberation' in terms of seeking something without prior know-

¹³³ PG 160, 1005 c. Plato did not 'make his Forms minds', though later Neoplatonists tended to do so. See, for example, Plotinus, *Enneads*, v. 1. 4. Plethon identifies or associates Forms and minds in *De Differentiis* (Lagarde, 336. 27-8, and 337. 21-2); and also in his correspondence with Bessarion (Mohler, iii. 460. 14).

¹³⁴ PG 160, 1005 c.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 1005 C-D.

¹³⁶ Aristotle does not use the words quoted, but the general argument is to be found in *De Caelo*, ii. 283^a33 ff., and in *Physics*, ii. 196^b10 ff.

¹³⁷ PG 160, 1006 B.

¹³⁸ Scholarios, iv. 105. 34-7.

¹³⁹ *Met.* xiv. 1091^a12-13, quoted in para. 24 on p. 293 above.

ledge.¹⁴⁰ Words such as 'generation' and 'deliberation' are often used in different senses, which you wrongly take to be univocal. In the same way you are mistaken in thinking that his uses of the word 'cause' are univocal. The passages to which you refer as evidence that he sometimes identified proximity with causation do not prove anything of the kind, since he did not mean that the causes closest to the effects were to be called the specifically sole causes.¹⁴¹

Even if one accepted your view that 'that which may be called proximate and immediate is specifically the cause',¹⁴² it would not help Aristotle's argument. For those who believe in Fate or determinism base their belief on two axioms: first, that everything which comes to be does so necessarily from some cause; and secondly, that every cause produces its effect necessarily and in a determinate way.¹⁴³ Aristotle saw that in order to eliminate Fate, he must eliminate one or other of these two axioms. He therefore attacked the first: he assumed that while some things which come to be do so necessarily, others do not. 'But if, as you suppose, only the proximate causal factor is eliminated and the other factors remain, does not that which comes to be still do so necessarily none the less?'¹⁴⁴ You cite as examples of things coming into existence without cause certain animals and plants, but you seem to be unaware that Aristotle said they are generated either by seed 'or by something analogous to seed', and he imagined that the wind plays a part in these cases.¹⁴⁵

In any case, even on your own assumptions, it is still true that what comes to be does so necessarily and in a determinate way, so you have not helped Aristotle to eliminate Fate. If he postulated the operation of a causal factor at all, he could not 'dissolve Fate', which was his main object. All that your argument has done is to make him contradict himself.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, you have mistaken the ground on which the debate on Fate or determinism is properly conducted. Aristotle used the words 'becoming' or 'coming to be' normally as the antithesis of 'perishing'. But when he spoke of 'becoming' as occurring without cause, he was describing something which undergoes some change

¹⁴⁰ See para. 32 and n. 128 above.

¹⁴¹ PG 160, 1007 A-B, based on *Met.* viii. 1044^b1-2, but with Plethon's interpretation mistakenly added as if it were part of the text of Aristotle.

¹⁴² Scholarios, iv. 106. 7-11, slightly misquoted by Plethon.

¹⁴³ PG 160, 1007 B.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 1007 C.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 1007 D.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 1008 A-B. At this point occurs the third and last disruption of the defective manuscript used by Gass and Migne. The right sequence is resumed at PG 160, 1018 A. See Masai (1956), 407.

and thus 'becomes' something else. It was in the latter sense that he spoke of natural phenomena, but in the former sense of human actions; and it was with regard to human actions rather than natural phenomena that he tried to eliminate Fate. That is why he made deliberation the ultimate source of what is to be; but in doing so he was mistaken.¹⁴⁷

He was mistaken because we should not readily deliberate without the impulse of external circumstances or the inspiration of a desire for novelty. But it is certainly in this direction, rather than to your notion of things coming to be without seed, that Aristotle would have looked for his proof of things occurring without cause. 'For his concern was above all to eliminate Fate from human affairs, in order to eliminate with it divine providence from them, consigning them to chance as he understood the word. For chance, as interpreted by philosophers, which has power only over that which is not dependent on ourselves, does not constitute an obstacle to divine providence; but Aristotle's chance, which has power over that which is dependent on a single cause, excluded both Fate and divine providence from human affairs; for just as divine providence is introduced along with Fate, so too it is eliminated along with Fate.'¹⁴⁸ Thus Aristotle provided Epicurus with the starting-point not only for his theory of pleasure but also for the elimination of divine providence.¹⁴⁹

There follows a general conclusion, eulogizing Plato at the expense of Aristotle, and abusing Scholarios in personal terms. Plato is praised for his piety in contrast with Aristotle's impiety; for his use of analytical reasoning in contrast with Aristotle's method of induction; and for his pursuit of a single unifying principle of being, namely God, in contrast with Aristotle's 'tendency to atheism'. It is implied that Scholarios may well be aware of Aristotle's defects, which he is trying to cover up 'with contemptible sophistries, emboldened by ignorance'.¹⁵⁰ In that case Scholarios deserves to have applied to him Euripides' lines (a fragment from *Phoenix*):

I never yet made enquiry of a man
Who delights in bad company, knowing that
He resembles those whose company he enjoys.¹⁵¹

'So much by way of a brief reply to your long-winded text, which did

¹⁴⁷ PG 160, 1018 A-B.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 1018 B-C.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 1018 C.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 1018 D-19 A.

¹⁵¹ Euripides, fr. 812, in *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. A. Nauck (Leipzig 1889), 623.

not even reach me in its entirety.' It will be enough to show 'both your ignorance and your intellectual failure. I have omitted some points, like your notion of the dual character of motion, leaving it to others to ridicule them. 'Since, due to complete incompetence, you omitted to defend Aristotle over the Forms, I omit to defend myself on the subject, from complete contempt.'¹⁵² I hope you may have learned something from my exposition; but if not, and if you intend to write a further reply, I shall not bother to reply again.

The more you write, the more you will make a fool of yourself. No one who is not completely ignorant and illiterate will pay any attention to you. You have a certain facility with words, but no capacity for precise thought.¹⁵³ So carry on abusing me if you wish: it leaves me indifferent. 'You can have nothing to say that affects me; you will simply be prattling to no purpose, and disgracing yourself by a further display of your own uncouthness. I have paid, and shall continue to pay, no more attention to it than to the howling of a Maltese whelp.'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² PG 160, 1019 B.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 1020 A.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 1020 B.

XVI

THE LAST DAYS

PLETHON'S *Reply*, completed probably in 1449, made no attempt to mitigate the hostility between Scholarios and himself. He deliberately withheld it from Scholarios' eyes for at least a year or two, so that Scholarios had still not seen it when he wrote to Plethon about his essay on the *Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*. The two men never met again, though they kept in touch on uneasy terms, and received news of each other through mutual friends.

Scholarios was continuously involved in the controversy at Constantinople over the Union, which fatally divided the Orthodox Church. The Russians, having repudiated Isidore of Kiev, never again invited the Patriarch of Constantinople to nominate their senior Metropolitan. At Constantinople two successive Patriarchs were virtually boycotted by their clergy for supporting the Union, and the second of them, Gregorious III Mammias, fled to the West in 1451. The Decree of Union was neither repudiated nor promulgated: it simply remained in suspense. Both the Greek and the Latin forms of liturgy were tacitly permitted.¹

A partial change of course came about, affecting both Scholarios and Plethon, with the death of the Emperor John VIII in October 1448. John had begun to have second thoughts about the Union, under the influence first of Mark Eugenikos and then of Scholarios. But Constantine, who succeeded him, felt no such reservations in the free-thinking atmosphere of Mistra. When he returned to Constantinople early in 1449, he was determined to make the Union effective. The intriguers who sought to put his brother Demetrios on the throne in his place no doubt counted on the unpopularity of his views, but they were disappointed. Scholarios' name was linked with the intrigue, probably unjustly. He had more than once written to Demetrios to congratulate him on his hostility to the Union and his decision to leave Florence before the Decree was signed. He also considered that Demetrios had a legitimate right to lay claim to the throne. None the

¹ For the historical background to this chapter, I have relied particularly on: Nicol, 390-6; Zisis, 159-98; Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople*, 48-72; Bréhier, *Le Monde byzantin*, i. 415-32.

less there is no evidence that Scholarios behaved disloyally towards Constantine. Feeling that he was less welcome than before at court, he decided at last to withdraw from public life, as he had long wished to do, and he retired to a monastery as 'the humble monk Gennadios' in 1450. But from his cell he became even more influential than before.

At first the new Emperor tried to assert himself more forcefully once Scholarios had left the scene. He sought to appoint one of the Greek Cardinals, Bessarion or Isidore, to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but his plan was frustrated.² He also sent an embassy to Rome proposing a new Council at Constantinople. But the Pope's reply merely denounced the late Emperor and called for the enforcement of the Union unconditionally. When the new Latin delegation arrived in 1452, led by Isidore, Constantine was still disposed to be conciliatory but Scholarios (now Gennadios) was not. He only met Isidore with great reluctance, and afterwards refused to see anybody except 'the few whom we know to be of pure mind and loyal to the past'.³

Plethon was also affected by the accession of the new Emperor, but in a different way. When Constantine left Mistra for the capital, he was replaced by Demetrios, who shared the Despotate with their youngest brother Thomas. Plethon was less close to Demetrios and Thomas than he had been to John and Constantine. Perhaps, in spite of his great age, he was present when Constantine was crowned at Mistra on 6 January 1449—the only Emperor to be crowned outside the capital city. The imperial Bull confirming Plethon's territorial privileges to his sons was clear evidence of continuing favour.⁴

Another mark of the new Emperor's favour towards Plethon occurred a year later. In 1450 the dowager Empress died on 23 March. She was Helena Dragaš (in Greek, Dragases), the widow of Manuel II and mother of both the last two Emperors. Her association with the Byzantine court had been long and influential, for she had married Manuel in 1392 and lived on at Constantinople for a quarter of a century after his death in 1425. She played an important part in ensuring that Constantine rather than Demetrios or Thomas succeeded to the throne when John died. At the end of her life, like many Emperors and Empresses before her, she entered a monastery, taking the name of Hypomone (Patience). Plethon was asked to compose a funeral oration over her when she died. Since he was probably over ninety years of age himself at the time, and unlikely ever to leave Mistra

² Sphrantzes, 332, 470-2 (Pseudo-Phrantzes).

³ Scholarios, iii. 178. 10.

⁴ Zakythinos, i. 240.

again, it can be presumed that his oration was not delivered in person over her grave. But the text survives, and it is one of his most interesting compositions of this class, combining history, classical mythology and philosophy, as well as personal esteem, in his customary ways.⁵

After suggesting that it would be easy for anyone to recount Helen's praises, Plethon began immediately to describe her descent and character. 'She was a Thracian by race': that is to say, a Slav. It was a distinguished race, which had also produced Eumolpus, who introduced the Eleusinian mysteries at Athens.⁶ (Eumolpus was one of those whom Plethon elsewhere included among the earliest philosophers after Zoroaster; but although associated in Greek mythology with Thrace, he had of course no connection whatever with the Slavs.)

Her father (the Serbian prince Constantine Dragaš) was the ruler of territory on the River Axios (Vardar), which had some of the best drinking-water to be found anywhere. He was a man of excellent qualities, but no one would deny that her husband was a man of much greater distinction than her father; for some men are unquestionably superior to others. These remarks lead into a philosophical excursus in praise of the late Emperor Manuel, who had indeed been a philosopher by temperament and education.⁷

'It would be difficult to find in all past recorded time any of the many states and kingdoms that have existed in which virtues and fortune came together and lasted so long as in the ancient state of the Romans.'⁸ That is why it is to be called Helen's good fortune to have married a husband so greatly superior to her own family. But his own fortune was less favourable, for he was 'besieged by barbarians'.

Her fortune varied, but whether it was good or bad she bore it with modesty and dignity; for her intellect was superior to that of most women, and in prudence she was not inferior to Penelope. She did good to many and harm to none. She had many good sons, and saw them live in harmony; or 'if they sometimes disagreed, they were not carried away into irremediable courses, as is apt to happen to the leading figures of similar dynasties, but settled their differences peaceably'.⁹

⁵ Text in Lambros iii. 266-80. The text in PG 160, 951-8, was taken from an inferior manuscript, in which a significant passage was misplaced.

⁶ Lambros, iii. 266-9.

⁸ Ibid. 272. 1-4.

⁷ Ibid. 270-1.

⁹ Ibid. 273. 12-15.

Although we cannot help sorrowing over the loss of so virtuous a soul, we must think of death as the departure of the best and highest part of ourselves to its proper place, and not as the annihilation of the whole: 'for it is a fearful doctrine that death is the annihilation of the whole of ourselves'.¹⁰ Such a belief causes men to become worse, not better, and any belief which does that must be false. The opposite belief, which leads men to become better, must for that reason be true.

Again, when we look at animals, we must conclude that we have not only something in common with them but something superior to them, 'a different and more divine kind of being'. Everyone who is not completely perverse must recognize that there is a God over all things, 'a Creator and provider who is absolutely good'; and that there is 'another nature between him and us, whether it be of one kind or differentiated into more kinds; and it is superior to our own nature but altogether inferior to his'.¹¹

No one can deny that these superior natures are minds or souls superior to our own. 'If they are such, then what can be their chief function and task other than the contemplation of existing things and in addition the understanding of the creator of all things, than which no other task could be higher and more blessed for those whose nature enables them to achieve it, and which man too is clearly able to achieve in addition to the rest of his contemplation of existing things?'¹² That is the difference between man and beasts: man is capable of acting like beasts, but also of acting like the superior natures. There must be an analogy between essential nature and conduct, so it follows that man must have a dual nature, partly divine and partly animal. His animal part is mortal, but his divine part is immortal, for it is beyond doubt that God, being in the highest degree good and without envy, has endowed man with a nature similar to his own, that is to say, immortal.¹³

The same conclusion follows from the act of suicide, 'for there exists nothing which is capable of self-destruction'.¹⁴ All things cling to existence and survival, so it follows that the suicide can only destroy the mortal part of himself, not the immortal. This is not the time to go into all the arguments, but the immortality of the human soul has been recognized by all the most respected peoples of antiquity: the Iberians, Celts, Hyrcanians, Thracians, Hellenes, Romans, Egyptians, Medes, Indians, and others. So we must not regard death as a permanent

¹⁰ Ibid. 274. 12-13.

¹¹ Ibid. 275. 10-276. 3.

¹² Ibid. 276. 6-11.

¹³ Ibid. 277.

¹⁴ Ibid. 278. 8-9.

separation from our friends and families, but only as a departure to our proper place. 'And there again there will be better things in store for the good and worse trials for the bad, since we believe God to be an entirely just and inexorable judge.'¹⁵

There was nothing that could be criticized as unorthodox in Plethon's oration, yet its tone might still be regarded as ambiguous by a hostile critic. The argument from suicide was advanced without any condemnation of the act of suicide as such. The superior beings intermediate between God and man would be interpreted as angels by an Orthodox Christian, but to Plethon they were more probably the inferior gods and daemons (*δαίμονες*) of Neoplatonism. Constantine, however, can have had no reason to question Plethon's orthodoxy, since otherwise he would not have been invited to write a eulogy of the late Empress. It was quite a different matter for Gennadios (as Scholarios must now be called), and perhaps also for Demetrios.

Plethon's relations with Demetrios were less straightforward than they had been with Constantine. Demetrios and Gennadios were close together in their shared hostility to the Union. Demetrios must have been pleased by Gennadios' letter congratulating him on his courage in leaving Florence before the signature of the Decree of Union.¹⁶ Although Plethon too had left Florence with them, and had earned a measure of approval from Gennadios for doing so, in his case it was a matter of indifference rather than Orthodox scruple. To have their departure treated as a heroic gesture, when none of them would have been expected to sign the Decree of Union in any case, can only have been a matter of sardonic amusement for Plethon.

Even if that episode ranged him alongside Demetrios, relations between them were uneasy. There is reason to believe that Demetrios' wife Theodora, the daughter of Paul Asen, was one source of bad blood between them. The same anonymous scribe who condemned Gennadios for destroying the *Book of Laws* after Plethon's death also attributed to Plethon a complaint that Demetrios and Asenina (Theodora) had conspired with Gennadios against him in his lifetime.¹⁷ It has been suggested that the obscure phrase in Plethon's *Reply* which accused Gennadios of 'boasting about the influence of a wretched woman—and a little tart at that', was a reference to Theodora.¹⁸ Certainly she and Gennadios were of one mind about

¹⁵ Lambros, iii. 280. 5-8.

¹⁶ Scholarios, iii. 118, 126.

¹⁷ Alexandre, 410.

¹⁸ PG 160, 984 D.

Plethon's heterodoxy, as was to be shown by her role in the destruction of the *Book of Laws*.

Demetrios was a weak man, just as likely to be influenced by Plethon as by his wife from time to time. He showed Plethon one act of favour when, in July 1450, he issued a silver Bull confirming once more the continuation of Plethon's territorial privileges to his sons.¹⁹ And Plethon did him one more favour in return, by addressing to him the last of his series of congratulatory allocutions to members of the imperial family. The *Address to our Sacred Master and Despot, the Lord Demetrios Palaiologos, Born in the Purple*, was written either at the end of the year 1450 or in 1451.²⁰

It was a melancholy, almost hopeless, time in the history of the Empire. The capital was divided by the controversy over the Union. The Despotate of the Morea was racked by the quarrels of Demetrios and Thomas, each aiming to displace the other. In the general sense of insecurity, it seemed that things could hardly get worse; but they were soon to do so, when Mehmet II succeeded his father early in 1451, determined to complete the destruction of Byzantium's remains. Constantine could do little to ward off the impending disaster, but at least he could intervene to halt the civil war between his two brothers in the Peloponnese. He succeeded in this by re-allocating their territorial responsibilities. It proved to be only a temporary reconciliation, but it sufficed to give Plethon the opportunity for his last composition.²¹

Plethon began his *Address to Demetrios* by drawing a distinction between civil and external wars. In the latter case it was permissible to use maximum force to destroy the enemy, as Cyrus did against Croesus in alliance with the Assyrians, whom he had previously defeated; and as Alexander did against the Persians, even after their King had offered to make a truce; and as the Romans did against Carthage, even though they started the Third Punic War in breach of a treaty. All this was justifiable. But the same rules do not apply in civil wars. The Athenians were blamed for slaughtering and enslaving the populations of Skione and Melos. The Spartans were praised for treating the defeated Athenians with moderation. The Athenian democrats based on Phyle gained credit for not treating the adherents of the Thirty Tyrants vindictively.²²

¹⁹ Zakythinos, i. 246-7.

²⁰ Alexandre, p. xxxviii.

²¹ Text in Lambros, iv. 207-10.

²² Ibid. 207-8.

Similarly Demetrios was likely to be praised for reaching a compromise with his brother, 'preferring to take less, with peace, rather than more, with civil blood'. He had made a convincing show of strength together with his foreign allies,²³ but he had been content to secure by diplomacy a good deal less than his full rights. In war the credit goes to generals and brave soldiers; in peace to ambassadors, such as the Emperor's emissary, Matthew Asen (Demetrios' brother-in-law), in the present case.²⁴

Both Thomas' and Demetrios' subjects would be grateful for the avoidance of civil war, as would also be the people of Constantinople when they heard that Demetrios had 'refrained from bringing a foreign army, as you could have done, against your own kith and kin'. The Emperor would also be pleased, though he would regret that he did not do justice earlier to Demetrios' legitimate claims. Plethon ended by praying that Demetrios would continue to handle his duties equally well and virtuously, 'so that you may enjoy the grace of God in all things'.²⁵

The *Address to Demetrios* may have helped to mitigate the hostility towards himself which Plethon suspected in Demetrios, encouraged by Theodora and Gennadios; but his relations with the Despot remained ambiguous. It was the same with Gennadios. Sometimes, though exceptionally, Gennadios wrote of Plethon with apparent admiration. In his letter to Demetrios recalling their departure from Florence (written probably in 1450), Gennadios referred to 'the good Gemistos' who accompanied them.²⁶ In a letter to Kabakes (written probably in 1450 or 1451, since it refers to the recent reconciliation of the Despots), he was still more flattering.²⁷ Sometimes praise and criticism of Plethon were combined in the same letter.

Gennadios' letter to Kabakes is an interesting example, because it was addressed to a man who was as guilty of paganism as Plethon, though presumably Gennadios did not suspect it at the time. He called Kabakes 'my master and brother', and told him of the friendly letter he had received from Gemistos (as he now called him again), and of his own letter of thanks in reply. Then he went on:

This is how it should be between us; other things shall make no difference, however they may be judged by him or us, or by our audiences, whether they

²³ Demetrios was in alliance with King Alfonso V of Aragon and Naples, with whose help he hoped to win the throne of Constantinople: Zakythinos, i. 277-81.

²⁴ Lambros, iv. 208-9.

²⁶ Scholarios, iii. 126. 23.

²⁵ Ibid. 210. 9-11.

²⁷ Id. iv. 457-8.

be philosophers, of whatever sort, or laymen. I greatly welcomed on his part the fact that he so admirably opposed that nonsense in support of the Latins. . . . Even if he gives some handles to our opponents, I nevertheless seized on his intention as being wholly pious, and I will always try, especially now, to defend him against his detractors, both as an advocate of the truth and as a friend.²⁸

Gennadios complained next that 'those who received that piece of nonsense [the *Treatise in support of the Latin Doctrine*] did not even show it to us, but sent it secretly to Gemistos, thinking to gain his vote against us'.²⁹ He professed to treat the intrigue with indifference. But there is an air of unreality about these exchanges. It is impossible to establish a true picture of their respective attitudes, since the 'friendly letter' from Plethon to which Gennadios referred does not survive. But it appears that Gennadios' letter to Kabakes, like his earlier letter to Plethon on the same subject, was cautionary as well as respectful. He was telling Plethon indirectly through Kabakes, as he had already told him personally, that he was under suspicion of heterodoxy.

The same warning was conveyed, again indirectly but in a more brutal fashion, by the letter which Gennadios sent to Manuel Raoul Oises in the Peloponnese, at about the same date.³⁰ Internal evidence shows that the letter was written not earlier than 1450 (since it is signed Gennadios, not Scholarios), and certainly before the fall of Constantinople. It refers to Gregory Mammias as Patriarch, which suggests that it may have been written before August 1451, when he fled from Constantinople to Italy (though he did not resign). Although the subject of the letter is the case of Juvenal (Iouvenalios), the indirect target is clearly Plethon; so it was presumably written in his life-time.

Gennadios began by congratulating Oises on his severity against 'the persecutors of Christ', and recommending further executions of 'those impious and accursed Hellenists [pagans], or rather shameless apostates from true piety, by fire and sword and water and every means'.³¹ He gave an outline of Juvenal's career, which he had followed at first hand. He had intercepted letters from Juvenal writing to his 'apostate friends' and recommending the names of others for recruitment to his 'brotherhood' in the Peloponnese and Thrace. Juvenal had tried to conceal his paganism by using the misnomer of 'monarchy' for what was in fact 'polyarchy and polytheism'. Although he was more

²⁸ Ibid. 457. 30 ff.

²⁹ Ibid. 458. 14-17.

³⁰ Text in *ibid.* 476-89.

³¹ Ibid. 476. 15-17.

cautious in writing than in speech, Gennadios had seen a heretical document written by him before the Council of Union in Italy.³²

Gennadios had several times been compelled to intervene against him. He had secured Juvenal's expulsion from the Thracian city of Ainos by its Genoese Governor. The Emperor later expelled him from Constantinople on the complaints of two bishops, though 'my advice was rather to arrest him'. Juvenal continued to circulate around the monasteries, claiming to have received honours from the Emperor and 'denouncing celibacy and the solemn character of the monks'. He even dared to return to Constantinople. Two or three times Gennadios confronted him and denounced him to his face. Finally Juvenal sought out Gregorios Mammias (before he became Patriarch in 1443) and offered to co-operate with him in supporting the Union, in return for his protection.³³

Gennadios had then written to Gregorios, who agreed to persuade the Emperor to expel Juvenal once more. Juvenal returned to the Peloponnese, 'for he knew the island was more fertile soil for his evil seed than elsewhere'.³⁴ At this point in the letter it begins to become unmistakable that Plethon was the real target. The letter continues:

He openly fought there against his own salvation, being a greater fool than those who had taught him, for although they champion paganism in talking and writing, trying to revive genealogies of the gods and their names undefiled by the poets and their simplified ceremonies, as they put it themselves, and constitutions and all those decadent and extinct ideas, they did not dare to speak or write so bluntly and openly against the words and doctrines and works of Christ and our most holy religion, even if they are in fact working for the destruction of all that is sacred, whereby they exalt and honour what is profane. So they deceive the public and enjoy honour, while destroying those who honour them, and they continue to be honoured by those whom they have destroyed, even though they are well known to them.³⁵

If there were any doubt that Gennadios had Plethon in mind, it would be removed by the phrases about 'genealogies of the gods and their names undefiled by the poets and their simplified ceremonies', for these are only minor modifications of phrases to be found in the preface to the *Book of Laws*.³⁶

Evidently Plethon was immune from punishment, but Juvenal was not. The latter, thanks to Oises, 'met an end to his life that was worthy

³² Scholarios, iv. 477. 38-9.

³³ Ibid. 478. 38-479. 5.

³⁴ Ibid. 479. 17-19.

³⁵ Ibid. 479. 19-30.

³⁶ Masai (1956), 304; Alexandre, 2-4.

of his disgraceful life, at the hands of pious men'.³⁷ Oises had Juvenal's tongue cut out, his ears cut off, and his mutilated body drowned. These were just punishments for his crimes. He was a man totally without redeeming features: 'a glutton, a drunkard, a buffoon, licentious, indecent, unstable'; he had been in turn a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, a determinist, and a 'denouncer of Christians'; he was also a bandit and a murderer of monks.³⁸ His whole career, and especially his paganism and polytheism, could be regarded as symptomatic of the corruption of the Empire. In Gennadios' words:

We have abandoned reverence for God! How? We have no Church! We have ignored the teachings of the Fathers, we have treated them with contempt; we are exchanging them for promises of gifts, from fear for our hopes! This happened in Italy, and has gone on until this day! We have given our sacred things to the dogs, and pearls to the swine! Among the Jews and the Arabs, laymen devoted to worldly things dare not speak against those who have knowledge and are placed in charge of sacred things; among us, the Christians, matters of the faith are tossed to and fro by people who have no right to do so. . . .³⁹

After an extravagant eulogy of Oises for acting decisively against the evil, and a long homily on the Christian faith, Gennadios returned to another indirect attack on Plethon. Juvenal deserved his fate, wrote Gennadios, on grounds of blasphemy and apostasy alone. The law declared that 'those who have been granted holy baptism and return to paganism are liable to the extreme penalty'; and also that 'if a Jew dares to distort Christian reasoning, he is liable to capital punishment'.⁴⁰ Juvenal, according to Gennadios, in fact did worse than either of these offences. There was no reference at this point to Plethon, but in referring to the specifically Jewish crime Gennadios presumably had in mind not only Juvenal (who was, by his own account, only a Jew by conversion) but also the Jew Elissaeus, whom he believed to have corrupted Plethon in his youth.

Moreover, the evil was not extinguished by the execution of Juvenal. At the end of his letter to Oises, Gennadios included a warning to others in authority that if they hesitate to punish pagans in the same way, and if they 'tolerate the progress of paganism when they see it', then 'either they are trying to conceal that they are themselves pagans or they will be adjudged pagans by God and man'.⁴¹ After declaring his own innocence, on the ground of his frequent protestations against the evil, he concluded that 'with the destruction of piety, all we hold

³⁷ Scholarios, iv. 479. 31-2.

³⁸ Ibid. 482. 3-12.

³⁹ Ibid. 481. 3-10.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 487. 31-4.

⁴¹ Ibid. 488. 37-489. 4.

sacred will be gone—the kingdom, freedom, laws, and customs—and within a short time all our affairs will be upside-down'. Then those who are responsible for the stabbing of Christ will pay the penalty.⁴²

The suspicions which Gennadios had formed against Plethon were abundantly confirmed after the latter's death. But during his lifetime Plethon appears to have been unperturbed by them. They rested only on rumours and the few phrases quoted, no doubt at second hand, from Plethon's own writings. It seems unlikely that Gennadios ever had the opportunity to read any of the incriminating texts before Plethon's death. That he could not have seen the complete *Book of Laws* in Plethon's lifetime is clear from his own account of the circumstances in which it eventually came into his hands, and his reaction to it. It seems unlikely, indeed, that anyone even among Plethon's intimates saw the whole work in his lifetime, since it has the appearance of having been continually worked upon and never finished. Both the surviving fragments and the list of chapter-headings suggest a piecemeal composition over a number of years, though this inference has been disputed (along with Gennadios' claim to have known that Plethon was working on it from before the journey to Italy) by a number of modern Greek scholars.⁴³

A few chapters of the *Book of Laws* did become known before Plethon's death, either because they were separate essays eventually incorporated into the final work or because select passages somehow slipped out into other hands. Thus, the chapter *On Fate* (ii. 6) survives in so many manuscripts that it must have been published separately. A short section of the chapter on the *Order of Use for Invocations and Hymns* (iii. 36) is supplied by Theodore Gazis, who presumably had a separate manuscript of this section available to him in Italy, but certainly not a complete text of the whole work.⁴⁴ It is possible too that one of Gennadios' informants had access to Plethon's preface to the *Book of Laws*, since it contains two phrases quoted in his letter to Oises.⁴⁵

Nothing more of the contents of the *Book of Laws* can be shown or even suspected to have been known to anyone but Plethon himself in

⁴² Scholarios, iv. 489. 9-16.

⁴³ A late date of composition, after the Council of Florence, is supported by Mamlakis (1955), 521-3; Tomadakis, 153-5; Nikolaou (1971), 305. On the other hand, I. N. Theodorakopoulos, *Πληθώνεια* (Athens 1977), 19-20, argues for an earlier date, perhaps even pre-1430, for the first stage of the work.

⁴⁴ Alexandre, 60-3. See also Masai (1956), 395 n. 2.

⁴⁵ Alexandre, 2-4; cf. Scholarios, iv. 479. 22.

his lifetime. He did, however, write a short summary of his beliefs which could be regarded as a synopsis of the *Book of Laws*, perhaps for the benefit of his initiates who were not to see the complete work. This brief work, in twelve paragraphs, is entitled *Summary of the Doctrines of Zoroaster and Plato*,⁴⁶ though despite the title neither Zoroaster nor Plato is mentioned in the text. Plethon's autograph survives, among the manuscripts bequeathed by Bessarion to the Library of San Marco.

The *Summary* simply states, in five to six hundred words, the rules which must be followed by anyone who wishes to be 'prudent' or 'right-minded' (*φρόνιμος*). He must believe the following:

(1) The gods really exist; Zeus is chief among them and 'altogether apart'; Poseidon is second; and the rest of the gods are produced by those two, without mothers but with the help of Hera. (Their nature is defined in some detail, which was to be greatly elaborated in the *Book of Laws*.)

(2) The gods provide for human affairs in accordance with the decrees of Zeus.

(3) The gods cause no evil and nothing but good.

(4) Everything that the gods do is in accordance with 'irreversible and inexorable Fate proceeding from Zeus in the best of all possible ways'.

(5) The universe, including gods of the second and third rank, was created by Zeus and is eternal: it had no beginning in time, and will have no end.

(6) The universe is composed of many elements co-ordinated into a single whole.

(7) It is created in the most perfect manner by the most perfect Creator, and nothing is left to be added to it.

(8) The universe remains permanently and immutably in its original form.

(9) The human soul resembles that of the gods, in being immortal and eternal in heaven for ever.

(10) It is always attached to a mortal body, being sent by the gods from one body to another, in the interests of the harmony and cohesion of the universe.

(11) Because of our kinship with the gods, we are obliged to regard the good as the proper end of life.

(12) The gods have placed our happiness in our immortal part, 'which is the supreme part of the essence of man'.

If Gennadios had ever read this text, all his suspicions of Plethon would have been confirmed. He would have concluded that Plethon

⁴⁶ Text and Latin translation in Alexandre, 262-9; Greek text only in PG 160, 973-4. The earlier edition of I. A. Fabricius, *Bibliotheca Graeca*, xiv (Hamburg 1754), 137-44, was based on a manuscript in which the twelve points were followed by a passage of equal length dealing with various crimes, chiefly sexual, and clearly derived from book iii. 31 of the *Book of Laws*.

was in fact at heart a polytheist, a pagan, and a determinist; that he believed in the transmigration of souls; and even that he shared the very heresy which he had condemned in Aristotle (and of which he had acquitted Plato), namely the belief that the universe was eternal and had no beginning in time. Gennadios would not have been impressed by any suggestion that the *Summary* was merely an intellectual exercise or a set of hypotheses. It is impossible to doubt that he would have been right. For although he probably never did see this particular text, which he did not mention even in his posthumous condemnation of Plethon, he certainly saw, after Plethon's death, the vast and circumstantial *Book of Laws*, of which the *Summary* was merely a foretaste.

The *Book of Laws* was certainly the product of a long gestation, whatever the date at which Plethon first put pen to paper. Gennadios cannot have been mistaken when he reported rumours about it in 1443-4, whether or not those rumours went back reliably, as he later said, to a date ten or more years earlier.⁴⁷ George Trapezuntius was equally categorical about the heresies expressed by Plethon in Italy during the Council, as well as his claim that many years were spent in putting them on paper.⁴⁸ The same inference could be drawn reasonably enough from the piecemeal composition of the *Laws*. It may be, as Masai suggested, that Plethon left two distinct recensions, one consisting of book i and the other of books ii and iii.⁴⁹

In the fragmentary state of the surviving chapters, it is impossible to be dogmatic about the effect of the whole work. But it is clear that Plethon followed the convention of his time in seeking to promote innovations by disguising them as a reversion to the wisdom of the past: in this case, by establishing a link between his own work and Plato's *Laws*. Apart from the title, he attached to it an appendix called *ἐπινομίς* in imitation of the Platonic *ἐπινομίς* (even if the latter was not in fact the work of Plato himself).

There are also several themes in common to the two works—education, ethics, and jurisprudence, for instance. But there are also major differences. Plato's *Laws* is a dialogue; Plethon's is a miscellany of essays, many of them quite disconnected from each other. Plethon devoted many pages to religious ritual, prayers, and hymns to the gods, which have no parallel in Plato. Plethon also departed much

⁴⁷ Scholarios, iv. 114. 31-2; 155. 30-156. 1.

⁴⁸ Trapezuntius, book iii, penultimate chapter; Legrand (1962), iii. 287-90.

⁴⁹ Masai (1956), 402-4.

further than Plato did from the religious ideas of his age, which is the reason why he needed to conceal them in a reactionary guise. The *Book of Laws* will be best understood if it is seen as a synthesis of Olympianism and Neoplatonism in which the gods are, in the words of Alexandre, 'des idées personnifiées'—the Platonic Forms personified.⁵⁰

The following chapter summarizes the remains of this last and most controversial work of Plethon's. It comprises the preface and chapter-headings, which are translated in full; and fifteen chapters which survive as a whole or in part, summarized with some verbatim quotations. Eighty-five chapters are completely lost, apart from their titles. The circumstances and the motives of the act of destruction which Gennadios committed after Plethon's death are examined in Chapter XVIII.

⁵⁰ Alexandre, p. lxxviii; cp. J. W. Taylor, *Georgius Gemistus Pletho's Criticism of Plato and Aristotle* (Menasha, Wis., 1921), 94.

XVII

THE *BOOK OF LAWS*

THIS work comprises:

Theology according to Zoroaster and Plato, using for the gods recognized by philosophy the traditional names of the gods known to the Hellenes, but restoring each of them from the sense given them by the distortions of poets, which do not precisely conform with philosophy, to a sense which does so conform to the greatest possible degree;

Ethics according to the same philosophers, and also according to the Stoics as well;

Politics on the Spartan system, but with the elimination of the excessive rigour which is generally unacceptable, and with the addition of philosophy, to be practised principally among the ruling class, this being the supreme merit of the Platonic systems of politics;

Ceremonies of a simplified kind, without elaboration but at the same time sufficiently complete;

Natural science, mostly following Aristotle.

This work also touches on the principles of *Logic*, on Hellenic *Antiquities*, and to some extent on *matters of health*.¹

Above is the complete Preface to the *Book of Laws*, as Plethon wrote it and Gennadios allowed it to survive. The same is true of the following list of chapter-headings,² except that only those chapters marked with an asterisk have survived in whole or in part. Some chapter-headings cannot be translated with certainty, owing to the loss of their contents.

Book i

- *1. On the variety of opinions among men on matters of supreme importance.
- *2. On guides to the best doctrines.
- *3. On the opposing doctrines of Protagoras and Pyrrho.
- *4. Prayer to the gods of learning.
- *5. General principles on the gods.
- 6. On Zeus the King.
- 7. On the supracelestial gods.
- 8. On the celestial gods.

¹ Alexandre, 2-4; PG 160, 957-8.

² Alexandre, 6-14; PG 160, 959-62. See also Masai (1956), 394-400.

9. On the eternity of all the gods.
10. On the generation of Poseidon and the other supracelestial gods.
11. On the generation of the celestial immortals.
12. On the generation of mortal beings.
13. On the generation of man.
14. On the variable disposition of man, alternately better and worse.
15. On the persistence of established things.
16. On the best condition of morality.
17. On the condition of private affairs.
18. On inheritances.
19. On mutual contracts.
20. On government.
21. On the cult of the gods.
22. On priests and their way of life.
23. On purifications.
24. On judgements.
25. On burial.
26. On the cult of the dead.
27. On the benefit to be derived from these Laws.
28. Analysis of being.
29. On diversity of causes.
30. On necessity of the causes.
31. On the names of the most senior gods.

Book ii

1. On the method of examining the questions posed.
2. Preliminary account of commonly accepted ideas.
3. Proof that gods exist.
4. On the providence of the gods.
5. Proof that the gods are not responsible for evil.
- *6. On Fate.
7. On the number of gods.
8. On the differences of kind among the gods.
9. On religious belief according to the Kouretes.
10. On the seven most senior gods and the other supracelestial gods.
11. On the generation of the celestial gods.
12. General proof of the three species of soul.
13. On the different species of stars.³
14. On the properties of the seven planets.³
15. On the individual movements of the planets.³
16. On the circular movement common to the stars³ and heaven as a whole.
17. On the soul of the stars.³

³ Plethon uses *ἀστρον* for 'star' and *ἀστήρ* for 'planet'.

18. Proof that daemons exist.
19. Proof that daemons are not evil.
20. Refutation of the calumnies against daemons.
21. On the differences between daemons.
22. On the immortality of the human soul.
23. On the creation of mortal beings.
24. On the creation of the mortal element in man.
25. On the senses and their properties.
- *26. On the rational behaviour of certain animals.
27. On the eternity of the universe.

Book iii

1. Recapitulation of the argument on Fate.
2. Recapitulation of the argument on the immortality of the human soul.
3. On the end of life.
4. On intelligence and its different forms.
5. On the education of children.
6. On the structure of government.
7. On courage.
8. On that which is and that which is not within our power, based upon the postulate of courage.
9. On different forms of courage.
10. On self-restraint.
- *11. On measure and symmetry.
12. On different forms of self-restraint.
13. On force, based upon the postulate of different forms of self-restraint.
- *14. On the prohibition of sexual intercourse between parents and children.
- *15. On the generation of the gods, based upon the postulate of a prohibition of sexual intercourse between parents and children.
16. On polygamy of one man with several women.
17. On the use of public women.
18. On the eating of meat.
19. On the unity of property in a single household.
20. On avoiding the dispersal of property on the death of individual owners.
21. On relationship.
22. On Zeus, and the impossibility of division in him, even in theory.
23. On the universe, and its unity in multiplicity.
24. On the diversity of benefits.
25. On justice.
26. On forms of justice.
27. Comparison of forms of virtue.
28. On depravity of manners.
29. On propriety in making gifts.

- 30. On contributions to the public treasury.
- *31. On judgements.
- *32. On the names of the gods.
- 33. On prayer.
- *34. Invocations to the gods.
- *35. Hymns to the gods.
- *36. Order of use for invocations and hymns.
- 37. Appropriate sacrifices to particular gods.
- 38. In what circumstances, to which gods, and in what way sacrifices should be made.
- 39. With what predisposition men should take part in sacrifices.
- 40. On exactitude in matters relating to the gods.
- 41. To what ends prayers should be addressed to the gods.
- 42. On oracles.
- *43. Appendix (*ἐπινομίς*).

The following paragraphs summarize the contents of the chapters listed above, so far as they survive.

i. 1. *On the variety of opinions among men on matters of supreme importance*

‘This work is concerned with the laws and the best political institutions by which men’s minds should be guided; and by following and practising which, both privately and publicly, men may live the best and most excellent lives open to them, and also the happiest of lives to the greatest possible degree. For it is of the nature of all men to aim chiefly and pre-eminently at this—to live in happiness. This is the one universal desire in all men, the end of each man’s life, the purpose for which they pursue and practise everything else.’⁴ But men define their happiness differently. For some it means pleasure, for others money, for others glory. Others again define it as virtue or the good life; but even these have different ideas of virtue and goodness. Some argue that it consists in knowledge, but others are persuaded by ‘certain sophistical charlatans’ that knowledge is not conducive to virtue and should even be avoided.⁵

There are similar differences of opinion on many related topics: on religious rites, on abstention from physical pleasures, on food, on cleanliness, on poverty, on decency. The relation of all these to virtue is disputed. Some believe in moderation, some in extreme practices. Some practise virtue for the sake of divine rewards, others do so for its own sake.⁶

⁴ Alexandre, 16.

⁵ Id. 18.

⁶ Id. 20.

Faced with so many conflicting views, one cannot choose the first available route, taken at random, in order to arrive at the right rule of life with a view to achieving happiness. One must begin by examining the true nature of man and his faculties, just as one would in the case of any instrument before trying to use it. Further, it is impossible to understand the nature of man without first considering 'what is the nature of the whole universe, what occupies the first place among existing things, what are the second and third forces of nature, what are the ultimate ones, and what is the function of each'. Only then will it be possible to ascertain man's place among them: 'with which of them he shares characteristics, and what they are; from which he differs, and to what extent; of what elements he is composed; what is his nature, and what his appropriate function'. Then we can see how he ought to live.⁷

On the nature of other beings there are again many disagreements. It is disputed whether or not gods exist; if they exist, whether they are indifferent to men; whether they are causally responsible for everything, or only for what is good; whether they can be influenced by prayer, or whether they are inflexible, 'bringing everything to completion in what is bound to be the best conceivable way, guided invariably by their own judgement in conformity with Fate'.⁸

Men also dispute whether there is one God or many gods 'similar to each other and identical in divinity'. Some believe there is one supreme God, but also other gods of the second and third rank. There are also different views of the nature of the universe: whether it was created in time, whether it is eternal, whether it is continually undergoing dissolution and renewal, whether it is the product of a cause but not created in time, whether it can be changed by the God who created it, and so on.⁹

There are finally different views on human nature. Some think it is akin to other animals, others that it is akin to the divine nature, others that it is intermediate between them. Unless one studies all these questions, one will not know how to regulate one's life. One will be confused, misled and miserable, instead of happy as one hoped.¹⁰

i. 2. *On guides to the best doctrines*

The subjects indicated have been treated by numerous poets, sophists, legislators, and philosophers, all of whom have made mistakes. The worst guides are poets and sophists, neither of whom are

⁷ Alexandre, 22.

⁸ Id. 24.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Id. 26.

concerned with truth. Legislators and philosophers, though not infallible, make fewer mistakes. They may err through the weakness of human nature, and there is also the danger that poets and sophists may be mistaken for them. Therefore it is important to specify which one intends to follow.¹¹

The list begins with a group of legislators, in what is presumed to be chronological order: Zoroaster, Eumolpus (the founder of the Eleusian mysteries), Minos, Lycurgus, Iphitus (who refounded the Olympic games), and Numa (the only Roman in the list). Next comes a list of 'other philosophers', who are presented collectively without individual names: the Brahmans of India, the Magi of Media, the Kouretes, the priests of Dodona. Then follow more individual names: Polyidos (whom Minos admired), Teiresias, Cheiron (the Centaur who instructed Achilles); and next the Seven Sages, namely Chilon of Sparta, Solon of Athens, Bias of Priene, Thales of Miletus, Cleoboulus of Lindos, Pittacus of Mitylene, and Myson of Chenai. Finally there is a group of philosophers in the strict sense: Pythagoras, Plato, Parmenides, Timaeus, Plutarch, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus.

A number of comments accompany the lists. Of the Kouretes it is said that they first established 'the theory of gods of the second and third rank, as well as the immortality of the works and children of Zeus and of the entire universe'. These doctrines had been rejected by the Giants, 'who claimed that all is mortal except the Creator alone'. Eumolpus is also praised for establishing 'the doctrine of the immortality of the soul' through the Mysteries. Teiresias is described as 'the most distinguished teacher of the theory of transmigration of the soul and its limitless ascents to the other world and descents from it'.¹²

Plethon adopts their opinions, he says, without alteration. 'Since all of them have agreed with each other on most of the important questions, they are regarded by the majority of right-thinking men at all periods as having expressed the most authoritative views. So we too, in agreement with them, will not attempt any innovation on matters of such importance by ourselves, nor will we adopt any of the recent innovations of certain sophists.'¹³

The difference between philosophers and sophists is that the former follow ancient wisdom, the latter always seek after novelty, attributing their opinions to divine inspiration without giving any reasons. Poets do the same, but their intention is merely to entertain. They may do harm, but that is inadvertent, whereas sophists deceive

¹¹ Id. 26-8.¹² Id. 30-2.¹³ Id. 32.

deliberately, even pretending to work miracles. The constant repetition of their doctrines does great harm. Reason, on the other hand, clarifies the truth and provides men with a scientific knowledge of their own, not borrowed blindly from the sophists.¹⁴

i. 3. *On the opposing doctrines of Protagoras and Pyrrho*

The mutually opposed doctrines of Protagoras, that nothing is true, and of Pyrrho, that everything is true, are both false and self-refuting. The logical fallacy in both is easily exposed. If every proposition is true, then so is the proposition that nothing is true. If nothing is true, then that proposition is also untrue. The plain man's view is right in rejecting both of them. Equally, given two mutually contradictory propositions, it is impossible either that both of them should be true or that both of them should be false. Nor would anyone claim that his forecasts of the future will either always be verified by events or always be falsified by events. Everyone knows that some will be proved correct and some incorrect.¹⁵

It is also a fallacy to argue that because of the inferiority of human minds, and because the gods do not wish to be the object of human curiosity, we must not try to understand divine things. The gods would not have given us the desire to know about them if they wished to preclude us from understanding them. Even if a man learns something of the truth by a divine chance, there is no reason why he should not seek to know more: the reasons for the truth, and what is good or bad, and why.¹⁶

There is nothing shameful in divine things, that the gods should wish to conceal them from us. 'If we use the ideas given to all men alike by the gods and the revelations on the divine nature, or at least those shared by the majority and the better kind of men, and if we then set these before ourselves as certain, and follow the guidance of philosophers in proceeding from them by rigorous reasoning, with the cooperation of the gods, we shall not fail to achieve the best interpretation on every point.' Plethon concludes that he must address a prayer to the gods, as the 'overseers of learning' for their help in his work.¹⁷

i. 4. *Prayer to the gods of learning*

'Come to us, O gods of learning, whoever and however many ye be; ye who are guardians of scientific knowledge and true belief; ye who

¹⁴ Alexandre, 34-6.

¹⁵ Id. 36-8.

¹⁶ Id. 40-2.

¹⁷ Id. 42.

distribute them to whomsoever you wish, in accordance with the dictates of the great father of all things, Zeus the King. For without you we should not be able to complete so great a task. But do you be our leader in these our reasonings, and grant that this book may have all success, to be set as a possession for ever before those of mankind who wish to pass their lives, both in private and in public, established in the best and noblest fashion.¹⁸

i. 5. *General principles on the gods*

'The conventions which we have most assuredly inherited from an unbroken succession of godlike men are as follows.' (From this point onwards the whole chapter is phrased in *oratio obliqua*.) 'The gods are everything in Nature that is greater and more blessed than human nature.' They provide for our happiness out of their abundance; they are the source of good, never of evil; 'bound by an irreversible and inevitable Fate, they allot the best of all that is possible to all men.'¹⁹ There are many gods of various degrees of divinity. Supreme among them is Zeus, who is ungenerated, everlasting, the father of himself, the father and pre-eminent creator of all other things. He is the absolute good.²⁰

Below him come the gods of the second and third orders. Second-order gods are 'his children and creations'; third-order gods are the 'children and creations' of the second order. They are his instruments for administering the universe, especially human affairs. All are under the orders of Poseidon, the eldest and most powerful of the sons of Zeus, his best and most perfect creation. Those born directly from Zeus are supracelestial gods, entirely detached from bodies and matter. They are essentially pure forms and motionless minds, acting solely by thought. Their attributes are interconnected by the community between them created by Zeus. Some are legitimate, some illegitimate. The former live on Olympus and can produce immortal beings; the latter (the Titans) live in Tartarus and can only produce mortal beings. But all are outside time, for time is the measure of motion and change; and they are outside space, having no bodies, though they are arranged in their own order. Together they form a family united by love, living in perfect harmony and order. They have a common origin and a common end, both of which are Zeus, their father and creator.²¹

The third-order gods are the offspring of Poseidon and his legitimate

¹⁸ Id. 44.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Id. 46.

²¹ Id. 46-50.

brothers, the Olympians. They too are divided into the legitimate, which are heavenly bodies, and the illegitimate, which are the 'terrestrial (chthonian) race of daemons'. The former have pure and omniscient souls and beautiful bodies. The latter are inferior in both respects: in particular, they are incapable of scientific knowledge and capable only of true belief, but they are none the less infallible.²²

There are thus four categories of gods: those of Olympus, those of Tartarus, the celestial bodies, and the terrestrial daemons. All are generated in the sense that they are produced by a cause, but not in time, because their origin is Zeus, who is eternally active and never limited to mere potentiality. They therefore have neither beginning nor end in time.²³

In Zeus essence (*οὐσία*) and action (*πρᾶξις*) are identical. In the mind, essence and action are distinct, though action is continuous. In the soul, essence and action are again distinct, but action is not continuous. In the body, apart from the same distinction, essence is divided into form and matter; and matter is subject to movement, change, infinite division, and dissolution. Hence follows a further distinction between different beings. The supracelestial gods, being minds, are uncreated not only in time but by reason of their immutable permanence; and though they are subject to a cause, because they could not exist on their own, they receive their being from it eternally and continuously. The celestial gods, or heavenly bodies, are again causally generated, but another distinction has to be drawn. With regard to their souls, they are uncreated, being eternal, but with regard to the activity of their souls and the nature of their bodies, they are created and subject to time and change. Time is the measure of the action set in motion by the creator, and thus it enters into every soul and body. The celestial gods are also confined in space, since they are linked with bodies. In this they differ from the supracelestial gods, who have no bodies and exist outside space.²⁴

The chapter ends, or rather breaks off, with an emphasis on the pyramidal character of the divine hierarchy. The Olympian gods are superior to the rest, but in numbers they are relatively few. Similarly among the daemons, those closer to Zeus than the rest are also less numerous. Above the whole hierarchy stands Poseidon, 'to whom the government of the whole universe in the second place has been entrusted by Zeus the King, as the most powerful of his children and the most senior in merit'. But Zeus has not made Poseidon equal to

²² Alexandre, 52.

²³ Id. 52-4.

²⁴ Id. 54-6.

himself, 'for it would not be equitable to make a being who exists through another the equal of a being who exists through himself'.²⁵

The preservation of the early chapters, especially i. 5, is sufficient to justify Gennadios' verdict that the work was heretical. It is only necessary to note the references to 'sophists' and 'sophistical charlatans', who were clearly Orthodox monks and theologians; the polytheism and the elevation of Zeus to the status of supreme deity and creator of the universe; the identification of Zeus with Plato's Form of the Good; and the unequivocal determinism of Plethon's system. Given that when Gennadios first saw the *Book of Laws* he was, in all probability, Patriarch of Constantinople, and was looked upon as the most eminent living theologian as well as the national leader of the Christians, he could not take a tolerant view of the work. Its destruction was inevitable.

The remaining twenty-six chapters of book i are therefore lost. So are the first five chapters of book ii. One fragment, entitled *The Order of Months and Years*, which Alexandre wrongly identified as i. 21, has been transferred to its proper place, after iii. 36, where it is found in a manuscript which was unknown to Alexandre.²⁶ The large gap of missing chapters is partly explicable simply from their titles, which indicate how offensive their contents must have been to Gennadios.

Six chapters (i. 6-11) on the nature and generation of the pagan gods were followed by six (i. 12-17) which appear to have dealt with this world and human affairs, and then two (i. 18-19) on such mundane matters as inheritances and contracts. These last eight might perhaps have been spared, but it is impossible to be sure. It is only possible to detect a more or less logical order of descending generality, a progression from the abstract to the concrete. But there is some justice in Gennadios' comment that the chapter-headings 'maintain no kind of order in relation to each other'.²⁷

The next eight chapters (i. 20-7) seem to have reversed the progression of descending generality. If their order is to any extent logical, they show the interconnection of civil administration and religious observance. Beginning with government in general (i. 20), they proceed through priestly functions, briefly interrupted by a chapter 'On judgements' (i. 24—a title which is repeated as iii. 31, which survives), to an encomium of the proposed legal system (i. 27). Then Plethon's mind returned to metaphysics, with chapters on being,

²⁵ Id. 56.

²⁶ Id. 58-60; Masai (1956), 395 n. 2.

²⁷ Scholarios, iv. 157. 38.

causality, and necessity (i. 28-30). To him the transition in the final chapter of book i to the names of the most senior gods (i. 31) would not have seemed in the least arbitrary or irrelevant. All these topics, secular and religious, were woven into a seamless web. That was no doubt why Gennadios found it necessary to carry out a wholesale rather than a selective destruction of the work.

The same arguments applied to book ii, of which only two chapters survive. One is called 'On Fate' (ii. 6), of which so many copies were made as a separate essay that it was impossible for Gennadios to have them all destroyed. The other is called 'On the rational behaviour of certain animals' (ii. 26). This is one of the few chapters which fits the category mentioned in Plethon's preface: '*Natural science*, mostly following Aristotle'. It would nevertheless be surprising if Gennadios had spared it deliberately out of respect for scientific knowledge, especially as the last sentence at which it breaks off (and which Alexandre mistakenly supposed to be the opening sentence of the following chapter, 'On the eternity of the universe'),²⁸ unashamedly reverts to pagan mythology.

The rest of book ii was evidently full of heretical material. It consisted of two chapters on methodology (ii. 1-2), seven on the gods and their worship (ii. 3-5, ii. 7-11), six on souls and stars (ii. 12-17), four on daemons (ii. 18-21), four on human and mortal beings (ii. 22-5), and one on the eternity of the universe (ii. 27). Of the lost chapters, Gennadios provided a clue only to that entitled *On the immortality of the Human Soul* (ii. 22), stating that Plethon believed in metempsychosis and that he argued that souls 'never ascend to the heavenly place'.²⁹

ii. 6. *On Fate*³⁰

Is the whole future determined in advance by Fate, or is it undetermined and subject to chance? 'Beyond doubt all things are determined. For if any event were to occur without being determined, either it would occur without its cause, and there would therefore be something which came into existence uncaused; or the cause which produced it would be operating in an indeterminate fashion, subject to no necessity, and there would therefore be a cause which did not produce its effects in a necessary and determinate fashion. Neither of these alternatives is possible.'³¹

²⁸ Alexandre, 82; Masai (1956), 397 n. 1.

²⁹ Scholarios, iv. 171. 16-20; Alexandre, 78; PG 160, 965-6.

³⁰ Text also in PG 160, 961-4.

³¹ Alexandre, 64.

It is even more impossible that the gods should alter what they have settled about the future, and should act differently under the influence of prayers or gifts or suchlike from human beings. In effect, to deny necessity and fate is to diminish the gods, either by depriving them of foresight or by making them the cause of worse rather than better results. Those who do so are guilty of one or other of these acts of impiety.³²

Either of these suppositions is in any case impossible. The whole of the future is fixed from eternity, in the best possible form, by Zeus, the sole King of all, who is supremely powerful, unchanging, and illimitable. Moreover, it is rightly so, because necessity is better than its converse, and absolute necessity is appropriate to him who is absolutely good. He communicates this necessity in lesser degree to everything he produces, great or small. If the future were not thus fixed, there could be no foreknowledge either by men or even by gods. They have foreknowledge because they determine events themselves: to deny them the power of pre-determination is to deny them foreknowledge. Knowledge implies a relationship between the knower and the known. This must be either that the knower is affected by the known (which is impossible in the case of the gods, since superior beings cannot be affected by inferior things); or that the known is affected by the knower, as by a causal relation. Foreknowledge and causation are thus inseparable.³³

Since the gods are the authors of events in this world, if they were not such in a necessary and determinate way they would not know how to proceed from day to day. Further evidence of this determinism is to be found in the fact that the gods sometimes reveal part of their foreknowledge to selected individual men. Some of these favoured men have tried to exploit their foreknowledge to evade or divert the course of events. But they have failed to frustrate Fate, and their failure was itself fated. Thus there is no escape from the decrees of Zeus and Fate.³⁴

The conclusion might seem to follow that there is no such thing as free will or divine justice. For it seems that men cannot then be held responsible for their actions, and the gods would be unjust in punishing them. But this conclusion would be a mistake. 'Men are masters of themselves not in the sense that they are ruled by absolutely no one, neither by other beings nor by the gods themselves, but in the sense that they have within themselves their sole ruling principle, namely their intelligence, and their other elements are ruled by it; and

³² Id. 64-6.

³³ Id. 66-70.

³⁴ Id. 70.

this unique principle, the intelligent and best part of our nature, is in control of all the rest.³⁵

Of course the intelligence is not totally exempt from external influences. But it does not necessarily succumb to them: that depends on its character and training. Its character depends on the gods, but its training depends on its own predisposition. True, this predisposition again cannot be implanted in a man 'without the attendance of a god'. But still men can be said to be masters of themselves in the sense that they control their actions, even if they are subject to a superior control. 'In a way they are both free and not free.'³⁶

It is an error to call freedom the opposite of necessity, since then one would have to call necessity slavery. Slavery implies subjection to domination. The supreme necessity is that of Zeus. But one cannot say that Zeus' necessity is subjection to the domination of another, as would be implied by calling it slavery. Furthermore, Zeus is the absolute good. Subjection to a good master, even if one calls it slavery, cannot be anything but good for the slave.³⁷

On another definition of liberty, it consists in living as one wishes. The man who lives happily is therefore free, whether he has a master or not; and the unhappy man is not free. Now, men are unhappy only when they are wicked. Since no one wants to be unhappy, no one wants to be wicked. So a man becomes wicked only against his will, and no one who is wicked is free. To be free is therefore the privilege of good men only, who are, by implication, those who submit to the necessity of Zeus.³⁸

Divine justice can also be re-established by this argument. The gods punish wicked men only in order to correct their faults. It is impossible that man should never do wrong, because he is composed of two parts, one divine and one mortal. If he is guided by the former, he is virtuous and happy; if by the latter, he fares ill. It is then that the gods seek to correct him by punishment, which delivers him from wickedness just as unpleasant medicines deliver him from sickness. Thus he passes from slavery to freedom.³⁹

So there is nothing wrong with punishment even if man's wickedness is involuntary. 'In conclusion, enough has been said, within reasonable limits, to show that there are gods, that they make provision for mankind, that they are not the cause of evils, and that they dispense the best to all men in accordance with inevitable Fate.'⁴⁰

³⁵ Alexandre, 72.

³⁶ Id. 72-4.

³⁷ Id. 74.

³⁸ Id. 76.

³⁹ Id. 76-8.

⁴⁰ Id. 78.

ii. 26. *On the rational behaviour of certain animals*

Some animals appear to behave in a way which suggests reasoning power. Examples are the organization of bees, the foresight of ants, the skill of spiders in weaving their webs. If they possess reason, it must be either superior, inferior, or equal to human reason. But it cannot be superior, because in most functions they operate less skilfully than men. If it were inferior, they would not confine themselves to achieving perfection in a single function, since that is the mark of superior minds. Again, if it were equal to human reason, they would not both concentrate on a single function and show themselves inferior in everything else. Therefore animals clearly do not operate by their own individual reason, but by 'the reason of the soul of our universe which governs all things, and the separate minds which preside over the rest from without, and to which the soul attaches each one of them'.⁴¹

The same influence is at work in inanimate nature. For example, it controls the vine and the marrow in wrapping their tendrils round branches; and also the magnet in attracting iron, and mercury in attaching itself to gold. 'Such is the soul which embraces the universe around us, and by its power governs all the parts thereof, causing other things to act rationally and bringing together those which have a natural affinity.'⁴²

The chapter ends with an account of 'the last, mortal generation' by the Sun and Kronos, acting on the plans of Poseidon, and bringing together under the power of Poseidon and Zeus all the different kinds of beings—eternal, temporal, immortal, and mortal—in a single complete system. The chapter breaks off at that point.⁴³

The last chapter of book ii and the first ten chapters of book iii are again missing. From their titles it can be inferred that they fall into three groups. The first group deals with metaphysical problems of the most abstract kind: the eternity of the universe (ii. 27), recapitulations of the arguments on Fate and the immortality of the soul (iii. 1-2), and the purpose of life (iii. 3). Next comes a group of practical studies, on intelligence (iii. 4), education (iii. 5), and government (iii. 6). The third group deals with virtues in the Aristotelian manner: three chapters on courage (iii. 7-9) and one on temperance or self-restraint (iii. 10). Although Plethon had made some attempt to group

⁴¹ Id. 80.⁴² Id. 82.⁴³ Ibid.; Masai (1956), 397 n. 1.

related subjects together, a clear impression is again left by the chapter-headings of a repetitive and ill-organized compilation.

iii. 11. *On measure and symmetry*

Beauty consists in measure and symmetry. It needs definition: it cannot be immeasurable or indefinite and constantly increasing. But it may be asked why this is so, when that which possesses more being is always superior? The answer is that that which possesses being in the highest degree is not that which is the greatest in number, volume, or quantity, but that which is most permanently durable; and that is unity, or what is relatively more completely unified.⁴⁴

The simple is more unified than the complex, the symmetrical than the asymmetrical, the proportionate than the disproportionate. What has a common measure or identical proportion is most completely unified. What lacks measure or proportion in its components lacks unity and consequently will fail to be permanent. So it is in measure and definition that the greater degree of being, and therefore of beauty and quality, is to be found, rather than in the constantly increasing and wholly indefinite.⁴⁵

The foregoing chapter may have been thought by Gennadios to be innocuous, but even so it may have survived only because it was copied separately. It was followed by two more lost chapters (iii. 12-13), which further develop the study of temperance or self-restraint. Possibly therefore the chapter above on measure and symmetry was not entirely an interruption of this theme. It could have been related to the theme of self-restraint in the same way as Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is to his theory of virtue. After the theme of self-restraint there follow two chapters which were allowed to survive (iii. 14-15), deriving social and theological conclusions from the doctrine of self-restraint.

iii. 14. *On the prohibition of sexual intercourse between parents and children*

There is no need to discuss the propriety of the law forbidding sexual intercourse between parents and children, 'for the fact that this convention is invariably and universally accepted by all men is enough to show that it is genuinely of divine origin, and therefore, since it is divine, it is correct'.⁴⁶ Where human laws conflict with each other, one

⁴⁴ Alexandre, 84.

⁴⁵ Id. 84-6.

⁴⁶ Id. 86. See also Masai (1956), 125-7, for passages from a better text than that of Alexandre.

naturally examines which is best; but where they all agree, there is nothing to discuss. It is still worth studying the origins of such laws, however, since these are not always obvious to public opinion. In fact few people understand the reasons for this particular prohibition.

Clearly in the first place sexual intercourse was instituted to perpetuate the human race and give it a kind of immortality. Secondly, it enables man to create something similar to himself. These two purposes apply equally to the gods, who are immortal. The most powerful of the gods produce creatures like themselves, both mortal and immortal. By sexual intercourse human beings approximate to the gods; and since they are thus imitating the gods, the act must be done in the best possible way.⁴⁷

Because it is a sacred act (and not because it is a shameful one, which it is not), it is best done in private like other religious observances. The same is true, for example, of the celebration of the mysteries. People also do it in private in order not to obtrude on others a spectacle which might inflame their imaginations. This might lead others to desire illicit forms of sexual intercourse, for example with the same woman or the same man whose performance they witness.⁴⁸

These are the reasons for withdrawing sexual intercourse from strangers' eyes. That the reason is not because the act is shameful is proved by the publicity given to the ceremony of marriage. Marriage is conducted publicly before witnesses, all of whom know what is the purpose in view. So the sexual act is among the most important that men have to perform, and it must be performed in the best possible way. Only if it is ill performed is it shameful.

It is one thing to play a game badly, but quite another thing to fail to carry out an important act seriously. 'If it is to be well done, as we have said, it must in itself conserve some image of the generation of the gods.'⁴⁹ (The chapter ends at this point; but something more on the prohibition of incest is added in the following chapter, which is one of the longest of all that have survived.)

iii. 15. *On the generation of the gods, based upon the postulate of a prohibition of sexual intercourse between parents and children*

The first task is to study the generation of the gods and their method of procreation, since that will show why incest would be contrary to the laws of divine generation. Zeus generated the gods he created without mothers, because no female could share his responsibility.

⁴⁷ Alexandre, 86-8.

⁴⁸ Id. 88-90.

⁴⁹ Id. 90.

Since no female played any part, no matter was involved in Zeus' procreation, for the female principle is the source of matter. In generating further creatures, Zeus used his first creations as models, but again no female. Thus he produced first Poseidon, the most powerful of the gods, and all the others as images of those already created, like a succession of reflections in mirrors, or like the production of the whole series of numbers from the number one, without the intervention of any other factor.⁵⁰

There is, however, a difference between the production of numbers and the generation of gods. The production of numbers can go on to infinity, whereas the number of gods is limited. Also, the former process is one of addition, whereas Zeus proceeds by division. He separates out the elements in his creatures, and passes on some, leaving others aside, in generating new creatures. 'Since these divisions proceed by way of contraries without leaving any middle term, they cannot be repeated to infinity, and he must finally cease the process. Thus he has produced a limited number of creatures and composed out of them one single system of all kinds of forms.' It remains to be proved that this is the way in which Zeus generated the supracelestial gods, not using them to produce one another.⁵¹

There are three and only three kinds of substance: the eternal and unchanging, which is outside time; the eternal and changeable, which is within time but has neither beginning nor end; and the mortal and changeable, which has both a beginning and an end in time. Since there are three kinds of substance, there must be three kinds of generation. If a creature of eternal substance comes from Zeus, so must all the other creatures of the same substance come from Zeus alone. For if they came partly from 'the pre-eternal principle' (i.e. Zeus) and partly from another source which is not pre-eternal, they would not be completely eternal.⁵²

Zeus created all eternal substance himself. He conferred on it the power to create the substance which is in time but immortal; and he conferred on the latter the power to create substance which is both in time and mortal. So each has its appropriate method of generation from the substance next above itself. If it were not so arranged, Zeus would be the creator of all substance, all would be equal, and the system would lack the 'perfection of variety'.⁵³

So Zeus proceeds as follows. He makes a single creature in his own image, the noblest and best of all created things. Then he makes

⁵⁰ Alexandre, 92-4.

⁵¹ Id. 94.

⁵² Id. 96.

⁵³ Id. 96-8.

another image of it, and then an image of that image, and so on; each image being progressively inferior to its model. It is like a father begetting children: first a male resembling himself, and then, as he grows less vigorous, either a female resembling himself, or a male resembling the mother, or a female resembling the mother, or even a child resembling neither of them, or finally no child at all. For generation is not at the will of the man, even if the creative act is at his will. He can create physical things at his will, but not generate offspring. But for Zeus to generate and to create are one and the same thing. His will and his power are identical. He generates and creates exactly what he wants, neither more nor less; and he makes a single unity out of all that he creates.⁵⁴

Unity implies community, and no community is more natural than that between an image and its model. Species are the images of genera, and also of other species of the same genera, the less perfect species being images of the more perfect. Thus temporal substance is the image of eternal substance, mortal nature of immortal, irrational of rational, and so on. The whole system is a chain of models and images, the images being always inferior to the models but intimately linked with them. They are linked both by their resemblance and also by their distinction, which is that of cause and effect, the ultimate cause of the whole process being Zeus. Once he has created the superior substances, he leaves it to them to distribute their attributes to those inferior to them. "The end of these gods is this, to form a community through which they can all compose a single system and the single best of all possible worlds."⁵⁵

Human souls receive their attributes from the divine intermediate souls, but are not created by them. They are produced from the same source as the divine souls, being likewise immortal. Since this is the case with our own souls, it must also be the case with the gods above, since there must be an analogy between them. But the generation of the supracelestial gods by Zeus takes place without mothers, so it cannot be strictly compared with that of men: the generation of the latter is more like that of second-order creatures produced by the supracelestial gods and their children. The first offspring of Zeus, Poseidon, is in reality a Form (in the Platonic sense) but not a particular specific form: he comprises all forms, he is the genus containing all species. He is the first cause of the form of the universe, after Zeus. He is the male principle which gives all other creatures their forms.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Id. 98-100.⁵⁵ Id. 100-2.⁵⁶ Id. 104.

The image of Poseidon, also created by Zeus, is Hera, who also comprises all forms but is less powerful than Poseidon. He is the effective producer of the forms of everything in the universe. She produces only the primary matter, which comprises all the forms potentially but not actually; she is the female principle which provides all creatures with matter and nourishment. Poseidon and Hera are related as the male seed and the menstrual fluid: the creature to be born is contained in both, potentially but not actually. The first has the productive force which provides the form, the second has less productive force but provides the matter.⁵⁷

This is an imperfect comparison and unworthy of their divinity, but it serves to illustrate their roles. Their union first produces the immortal creatures of the world, of which the Sun and the Moon are chief; and the union of Sun and Moon then produces mortal creatures in the same way. The Sun, as the first of the male gods in heaven, provides them with their form, and the Moon, as the first of the females, provides the matter.⁵⁸

The same process takes place in the underworld of Tartarus, where Kronos and Aphrodite play the same roles as Poseidon and Hera on Olympus. But since they only produce mortal creatures, it follows that the matter which they use is inferior. Nor is the generation of mortal beings confined to the Sun and Kronos. Other immortals, such as the Titans and the gods of Tartarus subordinate to Kronos, also take part in this generation, 'as we can readily learn by reasoning'.⁵⁹

One might think that the Sun produces his creatures by means of the forms stored in his mind, as craftsmen produce their artefacts. But whereas an artefact is produced only while it is in the hands of the craftsman, and makes no progress in his absence, the products of nature do not depend solely on the presence of the Sun: plants and fruit, for example, grow and ripen even at night. So the natural process cannot be attributed to the Sun, for its mind alone could not operate in the absence of its body.⁶⁰

It is equally impossible for the products of nature to perfect themselves on their own, since there can be no transition from potentiality to actuality without the intervention of an external force; nor would anything become perfect except under the impulse of something already possessing the required perfection. There is no alternative but to assume that there are 'certain Forms, subsisting on

⁵⁷ Alexandre, 104-6.

⁵⁸ Id. 106.

⁵⁹ Id. 108.

⁶⁰ Id. 108-10.

their own in the supracelestial world', which operate on the products of nature.⁶¹

They do so at first not by themselves but in co-operation with the Sun and other gods; but once a certain stage has been reached, they can continue the process on their own. It is rather like what happens when an object is thrown into the air. This cannot occur without someone to throw it; 'but once it is thrown, it continues to move because the air takes hold of it for a time by the very force of resistance, without the thrower touching it any more or impelling it.'⁶²

The same thing happens with the works of man. They are preserved by nature, since they are composed of natural elements. But they reach perfection only at the hands of the craftsman. If his hands are withdrawn, so is the form in his mind which was the model of the product. Actually, no form exists on its own in this world. They exist only in Pluto, who has charge of every human form and retains them collectively in their entirety, whereas craftsmen receive them in their minds only singly and separately. The same is true of mathematical numbers and quantities, which exist only in Hera, who has charge of their infinitude inasmuch as she has charge of matter. Again the human mind receives them only in a tenuous form, as shadows and phantoms of the divine forms, but still sufficient to lead men to accurate scientific knowledge. That is how the works of men are brought to perfection.⁶³

As for the products of nature, they are copies of self-subsistent models (in effect, the Platonic Forms). They owe their perfection not to the Sun, which appears and disappears, but to these models, some of which are more capable than others of producing perfect copies. It is natural that there should be such differences between substances and their causes. The eternal substances have Zeus as their sole cause. The next class, which are in time but immortal, have as their cause Zeus' children, who are all brothers, and especially Poseidon, who is 'like the architect in the construction of a building or a general in the victory of an army'. The third and last class, which is both in time and mortal, have as their cause not the children of Zeus who are brothers, but others who are born either of Zeus or Poseidon. They owe their generation chiefly to Kronos and the Sun. So much for the generation of the gods.⁶⁴

It has been shown that the gods are divided into male and female, the former providing beings with their form, the latter with their matter. But there are some who have no productive capability: they are

⁶¹ Id. 110-12.

⁶² Id. 112.

⁶³ Id. 112-14.

⁶⁴ Id. 114-16.

in fact the majority within our universe. They must have some function, since absolute idleness is not life at all. Each has a task which appertains either to the male or to the female principle, the character of the former being activity and of the latter passivity. So some beings in which form and activity predominate belong naturally to the male category, and others in which matter and passivity predominate belong to the female. It is practically impossible to find any neuter being between the two. All creatures have a mutual relation, according to their different characters, which reflects the sexual relationship; and in the case of material beings seeking to reproduce themselves, the relationship is sexual in the strict sense.

The gods, however, never have such a relationship with their own offspring. Thus, Zeus cannot have sexual relations with Hera or with any other deity. He needs the goddess only as a model in the process of producing divine beings. The same is true of the relationship between Poseidon and the Moon, or between the Sun and Hera. (At this point the chapter breaks off. The Paris manuscript—Par. sup. 66—used by Alexandre has the word ‘incomplete’ at its head.)⁶⁵

Fifteen chapters are lost between iii. 15 and iii. 31. Their titles show no coherent sequence of argument. Three of them apparently dealt with taboos: polygamy, prostitution, eating meat (iii. 16-18). Plethon in fact condoned prostitution; his views on polygamy and meat-eating are not known, but he was certainly aware that the latter was forbidden by the Pythagoreans, whom he admired without invariably following them. The next two chapters dealt with property and ownership (iii. 19-20). The next has a title, ‘On relationship’ (iii. 21), too obscure to be interpreted.

Plethon then returned to metaphysics, dealing with the indivisibility of Zeus (iii. 22) and the unity in multiplicity of the universe (iii. 23). Seven chapters dealt with different aspects of the organization of society: administrative and judicial (iii. 24-6), ethical (iii. 27-8), and economic (iii. 19-30). So far as can be judged in the absence of any of their contents, these chapters would seem to have had in common an Aristotelian rather than a Platonic character. Their headings would have fitted readily into the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Politics*, however different Plethon’s treatment might have been. The next surviving chapter is partly biological, partly religious.

⁶⁵ Alexandre, I 16-18 and n. 6.

iii. 31. *On judgements*⁶⁶

Animals, being irrational, do not act from their own intelligence but under the direction of the soul which governs our universe, namely the Sun, together with Kronos and other immaterial minds. Consequently animals cannot do anything which they ought not to do. For example, they carry out the process of procreation better than men, who are guided by their intelligence, which is fallible. Men sometimes use their faculties in a natural way, but superfluously, and sometimes in an unnatural way. This cannot happen with animals: even if they mate with other species, it is because there is a sufficient similarity of kind.⁶⁷

In the case of men, because their instincts are strong, severe legislation is needed. The gods know that men are liable to error, that some misuse their sexual powers, that others abstain from using them at all, either from asceticism or because they dislike the burden of a family or because they fear the loss of their children, and so on. In order to avoid an excessive number of such abstentions, which would weaken the link established by Zeus between mortal and immortal beings, the gods have inspired in men a strong passion for sex, which can only be restrained by the force of even stronger belief.⁶⁸

But the belief that sexual pleasure should be avoided altogether would have few supporters, and would lead only to persecution. On the other hand, the depraved indulgence in such pleasures is even worse, for man is a social animal. That is why the usual punishment for sexual perversions must be death, in order both to deliver the offender from his wretched condition and to spare the state from shame. Those guilty of pederasty or buggery or similar offences must be burned; and their victims, whether human or animal, must be burned with them.

Similarly with men guilty of adultery, together with those who have abetted them, whether male or female. Women guilty of adultery should have their heads shaved and be condemned to prostitution, which will help to keep other women faithful and supply a legitimate outlet for dissolute men. Rape should also be punished by burning, unless the victim is a prostitute; and even in the case of a prostitute, it should be a crime if committed during her monthly period.⁶⁹

Those convicted of such crimes are to be burned in the enclosures designated for their burial, separated from the public cemeteries.

⁶⁶ Text also in PG 160, 965-8.

⁶⁷ Alexandre, 120.

⁶⁸ Id. 122.

⁶⁹ Id. 124-6.

There must be three clearly distinct burial places: one for priests, one for ordinary citizens, and one for major criminals, including any sophists who presume to attack our creed. The same penalty is to be imposed for incest with a man's mother, sister, or other women in direct lineal relation. A man convicted of intercourse with any other forbidden relative should be deprived of his civic rights, pending purification, and debarred from religious functions. Those convicted of a homicide requiring expiation should be burned in the criminal cemetery.⁷⁰

A man convicted of sexual intercourse with a virgin or a ward, even if with her consent, should be burned and buried in the public cemetery; similarly in the case of a man convicted of homicide not requiring expiation. In the case of rape or adultery, the attempt is to be treated as equally criminal even if it is not accomplished. Anyone who feels irresistibly impelled to commit such a crime with another man's wife or betrothed should at once confess to a sacred interpreter and seek purification or means of restraint.⁷¹ (A break occurs at this point. In the Venetian manuscript of this chapter—Marcianus gr. 406—the preceding paragraphs are in Plethon's hand, but the following paragraph is not.⁷² The following paragraph does not run on naturally from the preceding paragraphs. It may conceivably have been transferred from the other chapter, i. 24, bearing the same title, which does not survive.)

If there is doubt about a conviction, the verdict should be reached by a majority. The accused should be acquitted not only if the votes for conviction are a minority but also if the votes are equally divided. A man convicted of a capital offence may plead in mitigation that he has previously performed notable services to the state; and if his plea is accepted, he should be imprisoned for a fixed term instead. The foregoing rules should give magistrates sufficient guidance, with the help of the gods, to deal with cases not specifically covered above.⁷³

iii. 32. *On the names of the gods*

Ceremonies in honour of the gods are important, because if they are properly conducted and in harmony with religious belief, they help to reinforce it. If not, they may undermine it. The results will be either

⁷⁰ Alexandre, 126.

⁷¹ Id. 126-8.

⁷² See Masai (1954), 547, and Masai (1956), 399 n. 1, for the implications of the survival of a partial autograph text.

⁷³ Alexandre, 128-30.

good or bad, as the case may be, for the whole conduct of our lives. But before going further into the subject, it is first necessary to discuss the names of the gods and to justify the revival of the traditional names as used by the philosophers. One can hardly use circumlocutions, or invent new names, when the traditional names are available.⁷⁴

It may be argued that poets have degraded these names and distorted their philosophical significance by making them the subject of myths, and that therefore they should be rejected. But there is no reason to regard them as permanently degraded. It depends only how they are used. If we use them in a pure and healthy sense instead of a fraudulent and evil sense, no trace of degradation will remain. One can hardly find any name, however sacred and pure, which has not been degraded by someone at some time. 'One could say that it has happened to the very name of God himself, when certain men guilty of many crimes. . . .'⁷⁵ (The paragraph breaks off at this point, in the middle of a sentence which presumably went on to identify God as Zeus.)

Book iii continues with theological and religious themes to the end. The next chapter, 'On prayer' (iii. 33), is missing. After it comes the longest surviving chapter in the whole work, 'Invocations to the gods' (iii. 34). It is divided into three sections, concerned respectively with morning, afternoon, and evening prayer; and the afternoon section is divided into three sub-sections. Much of their content, however, consists of narrative and description rather than pure incantation. If they were ever to be recited as written, the effect would be sonorous but tedious. For the purposes of a brief summary, it seems better to abandon the vocative case and the second person singular, in order to concentrate on the substance. But exceptionally, a literal translation of the first sentence may serve as an example of the rest.

iii. 34. *Invocations to the gods*: Morning prayer

'O Zeus, King, being in thyself, one in thyself, good in thyself, thou great one, great in truth and exceeding great; thou who wast not created from aught, nor is aught thy cause, nor is aught nor hath aught been in existence before thee; who art thyself by thyself pre-eternal, and alone of all things art utterly and entirely uncreated; and thyself art the first and principal cause of all things that share in being; through whom and from whom all things exist and come to be and are

⁷⁴ Id. 130.

⁷⁵ Id. 132.

composed and keep themselves in the best of all possible conditions, whether they be eternal and supracelestial, or within the universe and temporal, or whether they be immortal, or mortal and so placed in the last category of beings; the former of which thou dost thyself create and endow with all advantages; and to the latter thou dost furnish other benefits through other beings already born of thyself, making provision thyself that everything may be the best that is possible for them in themselves, and even more that it may be the most profitable as touching the state of the whole universe, which is thy supremest concern.⁷⁶

In the same style, Plethon continues: Zeus is the first cause, existing by himself, one in himself, good in himself, exceedingly great. All things derive from Zeus, who creates immortal beings himself and mortal beings indirectly through his immediate offspring. Next comes Poseidon, born of Zeus without a mother; next Hera, Poseidon's wife, also born of Zeus; then Pluto, Kronos, the Titans.⁷⁷

Poseidon, with his (unnamed) younger brother, created soul, and then with Hera he created body. The two together united to produce the Sun, which occupies an intermediate position between the supracelestial world and the visible universe. The Sun and Pluto combined to create mortal nature in its entirety. Younger brothers of the Sun are the planets, which govern all mortal nature, including the terrestrial daemons. Next come the stars, which supervise all things 'with exact science' and chant 'the great hymn' to Zeus. Last come the terrestrial daemons, which are subservient to the other gods. They are in direct contact with human beings, but they are infallible and immune from evil.⁷⁸

These are the gods who, under Zeus, watch over human life. They have divided our life into sleeping and waking. We ask them to grant us that we pass our waking life as befits them; and that our mortal element should not prevail over the immortal, so that we come to resemble them as closely as possible. By this community with them our life would be most blessed. Since thought is the most godlike activity, we wish our thoughts to be of the gods, and through them of Zeus. For Zeus created the second order of gods and gave the highest of them the power to produce a third order. Thus the deity is 'multiplied into a trinity', of which the second and third members are 'emitted' or 'emanate' from the first,⁷⁹ one of them immediately and directly, the other through the second.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Alexandre, 132-4.

⁷⁷ Id. 134.

⁷⁸ Id. 136-8.

⁷⁹ Plethon uses a past participle from the verb *προβάλλειν*, which he also used for the procession of the Holy Spirit: PG 160, 977 B.

⁸⁰ Alexandre, 138-42.

The gods have granted us participation in the Good through imitation of themselves. We ask them to keep us 'as free as possible'. We ask them to grant us that we use their gifts in constancy and freedom: 'for we should be foolish to try to coerce those who are quite simply stronger than we, and it would be unjust to lay claim to what is not granted to us by our masters, instead of being grateful for what is granted to us, which is not to be despised'. We must yield to fate because we know the gods do all that is best for us. We must not be angry with man, 'whose nature it is to follow what he thinks good, and who cannot hurt us if we know how to take care of ourselves and to be content with our own proper benefits'.⁸¹

There follow various prayers to the gods to promote virtuous conduct. Among them are prayers that we should not refrain from doing right for fear of suffering penalties, loss, or disrepute; that we should practise moderation in sensual pleasures, for the good of both soul and body; that we should not desire excessive wealth; that we should be indifferent to public opinion, except that of virtuous men; and that we should not seek self-glorification.⁸²

We should accord everyone his due, especially our parents 'who are for us your own images'—that is, of the gods. We must put the common interest of city and race before our own, since the gods prefer the interest of the whole to that of the parts. We should carry out the sacred ceremonies not because the gods require them but because they mould and impress our own imagination, making it more amenable to reason. Our aim is to be assimilated to the gods.⁸³

The morning invocation ends with a personal prayer to Zeus. In the course of it other gods are associated with him, but their dependence on him is emphasized. The chapter ends with directions as to the occasions when the invocation is to be recited, in full on holy days and in an abridged form on ordinary days.⁸⁴ (Holy days are defined in iii. 36 by reference to the phases of the moon. It is also explained there that the day begins at midnight, not at sunrise.)

iii. 34. (*continued*): afternoon prayer (i)

The first afternoon prayer begins with the invocation of Poseidon, who is not uncreated like Zeus but is superior to all other created beings. He is described as being 'his own form' (*αὐτοεἶδος*), 'his own limit' (*αὐτοπέρας*), and 'good in himself' or 'his own good' (*αὐτοκαλόν*). Next to him comes Hera, who is both his sister and his

⁸¹ Id. 144-6.

⁸² Id. 146-8.

⁸³ Id. 150-2.

⁸⁴ Id. 154-6.

wife, and the mother of other gods. Next come the Olympians, with Apollo and Artemis in first place, and their functions are defined. They preside over 'all changeable nature, which may be called created because it is produced by a cause and is continually coming to be through change; but also uncreated in the sense that it had no beginning in time'. These gods, who are superior to time, know neither past nor future: to them all is permanently present.⁸⁵

The functions assigned to the gods are not those of classical mythology. Apollo and Artemis preside respectively over identity and diversity. Hephaistos is responsible for rest and immobility, Dionysos for voluntary motion, Athene for involuntary or impelled motion. Atlas, Tithonos, and Dione share responsibility for the heavenly bodies. Hermes rules over terrestrial daemons. Pluto is responsible for the immortal part of our nature. Hestia presides over earth; only Tethys is in her traditional element, presiding over 'the wet and liquid'. No reasons are given for the allocation of responsibilities. The prayer ends, like the morning prayer, with directions as to the occasions for its use.⁸⁶

iii. 34. (*continued*): afternoon prayer (ii)

The prayer is addressed first to Kronos, as sovereign of the mortal world, for the creation of which he is responsible, together with the Sun. With Kronos are associated Aphrodite, Pan, Demeter, Kore (Persephone), and Pluto, each of whom has particular responsibilities; with the Sun are associated his six siblings, the planets. The Sun also presides over the terrestrial daemons, the immortal part of our nature, and the mortal part together with Kronos and the Titans. The assignment of attributes to these gods is more in accordance with classical tradition. Aphrodite presides over the transmission of eternity in the mortal world through the succession of beings; Pan is the protector of wild animals, and Demeter of plants. The prayer ends, as usual, with directions for its use on different occasions.⁸⁷

iii. 34 (*continued*): afternoon prayer (iii)

This is described as the most important prayer in the series, being addressed to Zeus. The adjectives applied to him are the same as in morning prayer. They are elaborated in metaphysical terms. Zeus is the 'self-fathered father of fathers, creator of creators, ungenerated author of generated beings'. His is 'an absolute unity, not a unity in

⁸⁵ Alexandre, 156-60.

⁸⁶ Id. 160-4.

⁸⁷ Id. 164-8.

multiplicity, for it would be impossible either that several uncreated beings should be united in a single whole, since they would require a single greater power to unite them; or that others proceeding from a single uncreated being should merge with it, since they would have no community of nature with this self-existent being, given that they drew their being from elsewhere and thereby became distinct from it'.⁸⁸

Zeus created all existing things, including the other gods, whom he divided into legitimate offspring (Olympians) and illegitimate (the Titans of Tartarus). The most senior of the former is Poseidon, of the latter Kronos. Zeus also created the Forms, using as model his own substance which is separate from matter, and establishing them in our universe but not separating them entirely from matter. The Forms within our universe are divided into two categories: first, the whole category of beings without reason (that is, material entities), in which form and matter are inseparable; secondly, the category of the rational soul, in which matter and form are 'actually unseparated but potentially separable'.⁸⁹

The Form of the rational soul Zeus divided into three: the stars, daemons, and human beings. The material universe Poseidon divided into four elements: earth, air, fire, and water, from which bodies are formed as vehicles for souls. Fire, as the lightest of the elements, is the vehicle for the souls of the stars. Two sorts of stars were created, the fixed stars and the planets, all of which have souls. The planets assist Poseidon in the creation of mortal beings, by attaching souls to bodies.⁹⁰

There are three orders of creation: first, the unchangeable and eternal, created by Zeus; second, the immortal which is yet subject to time and change, created by Poseidon; third, the lower and mortal creation by the Sun and Kronos. The first two are linked by the celestial system, the second and third by human nature. We have been made partly mortal and partly immortal, to serve as a link between the latter two categories of being. The aim, which has been perfectly achieved, is to create a general harmony and to serve the greatest good of all. The prayer ends without specific directions on its use.⁹¹

iii. 34 (*continued*): evening prayer

The prayer begins with invocations to Zeus and Poseidon in familiar terms. Zeus is the sovereign cause of all that is good, Poseidon transmits his benefits to us, especially our knowledge of the gods and

⁸⁸ Id. 168-70.

⁸⁹ Id. 172-6.

⁹⁰ Id. 176-80.

⁹¹ Id. 180-2.

ourselves. We owe it to both that we are associated in their 'political communion with each other', and that we thereby share in a similarity to them. They have subordinated to reason that part of our soul which inclines to belief (*δόξα*), which by implication may be deceptive. So those of us who reason best are able to control our lower nature by our higher. They have enabled us to enjoy pleasure in moderation and within reason, so that we remain free; and we do not resent what happens against our wishes, whether caused by daemons or human agency. Consequently we even accept afflictions to our lower nature for the sake of our higher nature.⁹²

The gods have also given us sense-organs and the instinct of sex, so ensuring a sufficient supply of bodies to match the souls which enter them 'at fixed intervals of time'. They have given us hands and the skill to make use of animals. They ask nothing in return. They have given us intelligence, and they correct our errors. If punishment is necessary, it may be inflicted on us either in this world or the next. We ask only that our faults may be forgiven, so that our divine part may join in the festival with those who have gone before, and enjoy a better and more divine life of longer duration. We shall then remember our earlier lives, both in this world and in the other, which are now effaced from our memory by the waters of Lethe, leaving us wrapped in the darkness of our mortal nature. We shall then know the future, of which we now have only vague images brought to us by daemons in dreams, or in waking visions.⁹³

The prayer concludes with salutations to heroes, ancestors, relatives, and friends gone before; and also to the daemons, Pluto, and other gods. They are asked to protect us as they judge best our circumstances, and 'as is also fated from the beginning of time'.⁹⁴ Like its predecessor, this prayer contains no directions about the occasions for its use. The implication is that it is to be recited daily, in full. A later chapter (iii. 36) contains what may be called a general order of service.

iii. 35 *Hymns to the gods*

Plethon provides twenty-seven hymns, each consisting of nine hexameters.⁹⁵ Judged by classical standards, the hexameters are mostly very poor in prosody. Many have no caesura, many do not even

⁹² Alexandre, 184-8.

⁹³ Id. 188-98.

⁹⁴ Id. 198-202. For minor additions to this chapter in BL Add. MS 5424, see Masai (1956), 399 n. 3.

⁹⁵ Alexandre, 202-8. A more complete text is to be found in BL Add. MS 5424: see Masai (1956), 400 n. 1.

scan. Nor do the verses show any trace of poetic or truly religious feeling. A number of them are purely imitative, for example of the Homeric *Hymns* or of Hesiod's *Theogony*. There are also three hymns at the end which seem to carry faint echoes of the Sermon on the Mount, each consisting of three triplets beginning: 'Blessed is he . . .'.⁹⁶

The hymns are divided into four categories: perennial, monthly, sacred, and daily. The perennial category contains only two hymns (I-II), both addressed to Zeus.⁹⁷ In the monthly category are thirteen hymns (III-XV), addressed respectively to Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, the Olympians, Apollo, Artemis, the celestial gods (Sun, Moon, stars, and planets), Athene, Dionysos, the Titans, Hephaistos, the daemons, and finally to Zeus and all the gods collectively.⁹⁸ The sacred hymns, for use on holy days, number six (XVI-XXI), addressed to Zeus, the Olympians, the gods in general, the inferior gods, Pluto, and Zeus again.⁹⁹ The daily category comprises six hymns (XXII-XXVII), each to be sung on a particular day of the week from the second to the seventh inclusive.¹⁰⁰ The chapter ends with a brief account of the heroic hexameter, which Plethon describes as 'the most beautiful of all rhythms' and as having 'a majestic character unequalled by any other'.¹⁰¹

iii. 36. *Order of use for invocations and hymns*

The instructions on the celebration of Plethon's liturgy are extremely precise and detailed. Prayers, three times a day, are followed by hymns. The services take place between rising and breakfast, between noon and supper, and between supper and sleeping, with special provisions on fast-days. They take place in temples or other purified places. They are announced by a sacred herald or other designated person. The exact words of the announcement are prescribed. It is made once on ordinary days, twice on holy days, three times at the new moon.¹⁰²

The procedure for individual worshippers is minutely prescribed. All look upwards, kneel, raise their hands with the palms upwards, and intone: 'O gods, be merciful!' In worshipping Zeus they place

⁹⁶ Alexandre, 224-6.

⁹⁷ Id. 202-4. 'Perennial' translates *διετήσιος*, which Pellissier renders as 'annuel ou pour toute l'année'.

⁹⁸ Id. 204-16.

⁹⁹ Id. 216-20.

¹⁰⁰ Id. 222-6.

¹⁰¹ Id. 228.

¹⁰² Id. 228-30. A more complete text is to be found in BL Add. MS 5424; see Masai (1956), 400 n. 1. For a detailed analysis of the liturgy, see Anastos, 252-68.

the right hand on the ground and rise on one knee; in worshipping the other gods they do the same with the left hand on the ground; then they pray to Zeus again, placing both hands on the ground, kneeling on both knees, and prostrating the head on the ground. They repeat the prayer three times, followed by three prostrations. This procedure counts as one act of worship on ordinary days; but on holy days the whole procedure is repeated three times.¹⁰³

The act of worship is led by the priest or the most respected of the congregation. The invocation is chanted in different modes: Hypophrygian with the right hand lowered, Phrygian with the left hand lowered, Hypodorian in praying to Zeus. Next the herald announces the prayers appropriate to the time of day. All kneel on both knees, and the leading member of the congregation leads the prayer. The herald then announces the hymns. On ordinary days these are recited without music; on holy days usually with musical accompaniment.¹⁰⁴ There follow detailed instructions on the hymns appropriate to particular days, and the types of music to which they are to be sung. It is explained why there are thirteen monthly hymns, to make provision for years in which there is an intercalary month. The allocation of the six daily hymns is explained, in relation to the phases of the moon.¹⁰⁵

The last section of the chapter on the liturgy defines the basis of Plethon's calendar. The calendar follows the natural order, which prescribes lunar months and solar years. The day of the 'old and new moon' is the day on which 'the moon and the sun are in conjunction according to the calculations of those most experienced in astronomy'. The following day, beginning at midnight, is the new moon or first of the month. There are thirty days in 'full' months and twenty-nine days in 'hollow' or 'incomplete' months. Each day begins at midnight.¹⁰⁶

The days of the month are counted thus: New Moon day, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th day of the waxing moon; 7th, 6th, 5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd day of the mid-moon; Full Moon day; 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th day of the waning moon; 7th, 6th, 5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd day of the end-moon; Old Moon day; Old-and-New Moon day. Since the New Moon, Full Moon, Old Moon and Old-and-New Moon each count as a day, the total is thirty days. In 'hollow' months, however, the Old Moon day is omitted, leaving twenty-nine days.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Alexandre, 230-2.

¹⁰⁴ Id. 232.

¹⁰⁵ Id. 236-40.

¹⁰⁶ Id. 58-62. Alexandre mistakenly identified these paragraphs as part of book i. 21, 'On the cult of the gods': see Masai (1956), 395 n. 2. For a detailed analysis of the calendar, see Anastos, 188-252.

¹⁰⁷ Alexandre, 58-60.

The first month is that which follows the winter solstice. There follow normally twelve months until the next winter solstice. Since there will always be a number of uncounted days at the end of twelve months (whatever the balance between 'full' and 'hollow' months), a thirteenth intercalary month is to be inserted to take them up; but Plethon does not say how often this will occur.¹⁰⁸

The manuscript of this chapter breaks off at that point, but it has been supplemented by a number of quotations from Theodore Gazis.¹⁰⁹ Gazis explained first that Plethon did not revive the traditional Attic names of the months but only assigned numbers to them.¹¹⁰ Presumably the reason was that it was too difficult to identify the Attic months precisely. He added, secondly, that the division of the month into four quarters was intended to accommodate the new holy days which Plethon proposed to institute.¹¹¹ Thirdly, he criticized the innovation of the new holy days: six in a month would severely cut down the time available for work.¹¹² In addition, there would be the loss of the days of the Old Moon, dedicated to Pluto, the Old-and-New Moon, given up to the examination of conscience, and the New Moon, dedicated to Zeus. Fourthly, according to Gazis, the numbering of the days of the month did not fundamentally differ from contemporary practice, though he noted one discrepancy: Plethon's Old Moon day was normally called the second day of the end-moon.¹¹³ Finally, in contrast with Strabo and others, Plethon thought that the months should be determined by the moon and the year by the sun.¹¹⁴

Six more chapters are lost (iii. 37-42) before the last chapter or *Appendix* (*ἐπινομίς*, iii. 43), which survives. All the lost chapters were religious in character. Four of them contained references to 'the gods' in their titles, and the other two were concerned with sacrifices (iii. 39) and oracles (iii. 42). Evidently they were not merely religious but explicitly pagan, and naturally incurred Gennadios' wrath as being polytheistic. No doubt the *ἐπινομίς*, which summarizes the basic principles of the *Book of Laws*, would also have perished if it had not been independently copied. Although it obviously took its title from the appendix of the same name to Plato's *Laws*, its character and

¹⁰⁸ Id. 60.

¹⁰⁹ Theodore Gazis, *Liber de mensibus*, in PG 19, 1168-216; Alexandre, 60-2. See also Masai (1956), 400 n. 1.

¹¹⁰ PG 19, 1213 B-C.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 1208 A.

¹¹² Ibid. 1208 B.

¹¹³ Ibid. 1209 C.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 1197 D (omitted by Alexandre).

purpose are quite different. The Platonic *ἐπινομίς* (which was perhaps not written by Plato himself) continues the argument of the *Laws*, but Plethon's *ἐπινομίς* is a summary rather than a continuation.

iii. 43. *Appendix* (*ἐπινομίς*)

The object of the present work has now been achieved, with the help of the appropriate gods. 'We have demonstrated what is the first principle of the universe'; and also what are its dependencies of the second and third order; what is the place of man among them, what is his composition, what is his proper and happiest way of life. To live happily is the supreme desire of all men. We have examined how it is to be achieved, starting from certain ideas and principles of which the most important are three: first, that Zeus, the first principle, is supremely good and perfect; secondly, that there must be a reciprocal relationship between all beings or essences and their modes of generation; thirdly, that there must be a reciprocal relationship between all beings or essences and their functions or activities.¹¹⁵

From the first principle it has been deduced that the universe is, like Zeus himself, eternal and that it will remain for ever unchangeable. Since Zeus is perfect, he could not have failed to create the universe and to make it good, since the perfect being must wish to share his perfection with other beings so far as possible, and it would have been impossible for him to make the universe less good than it could have been. Similarly, he could not change it in the smallest constituent parts without making it less good. Even such a minute change would also change the outward configuration of the universe, since that could not remain unchanged if any of its constituent parts were changed.¹¹⁶

The second principle establishes the hierarchy of divine beings, 'for the essence of all things divides into three orders: that which is always the same and in all respects unchangeable; that which is eternal but changeable in time; and that which is mortal'. Since each must have its appropriate mode of generation, we assign the creation of the first order to Zeus, the second order to Poseidon and some of his legitimate brothers, and the third order to the first of Zeus' illegitimate sons, Kronos, and to the most powerful of Poseidon's legitimate sons, the Sun, in each case assisted by some of their brothers.¹¹⁷

The third principle establishes that man is composed of two

¹¹⁵ Alexandre, 240-2. The *Appendix* is reprinted in PG 160, 967-74.

¹¹⁶ Id. 242-4.

¹¹⁷ Id. 244.

elements, one mortal and one immortal, since in some respects he behaves like an animal and in other respects like a god. His most important and godlike function is 'the contemplation of existing things', which finally culminates in 'the comprehension of Zeus'. A further proof that he combines two orders of being lies in the fact that no creature voluntarily goes to its own destruction. Since man is capable of committing suicide, and since it is impossible that this should really be the self-destruction of his mortal element, it must clearly be the act of a superior, immortal element which will not perish with the body but will be released from it. Otherwise it would resist and prevent the act of suicide.¹¹⁸

The combination in man of mortal and immortal elements was put into effect by the gods at the will of Zeus, since if no such combination existed in the universe it would be divided into two parts, one mortal and one immortal, and it would not be unified. Man in effect stands on the borderline between those two parts. But the combination in man cannot be either permanent or momentary. If it were permanent, then the mortal part of man would become immortal and man would be one of the gods. If it were momentary, then every time the mortal and immortal parts were separated by death, the universal harmony would be dissolved. Therefore the combination must be described as partial only, but constantly renewed. Every time the body is destroyed, the two parts go their separate ways, but the process is repeated throughout all eternity.¹¹⁹

These are the doctrines which were taught by the followers of Pythagoras and Plato, and also by the Kouretes and Zoroaster. They have always been accepted as 'common ideas' (*κοινὰ ἔννοια*), even if not by all men, at least by those who have been guided by the gods. The oldest of them known to us is Zoroaster, who is said to have lived 5,000 years before the return of the Herakleidai. Min, the Egyptian legislator, who is said to have lived 3,000 years before Zoroaster, is not to be taken seriously. His doctrines were faulty and did not influence Zoroaster.¹²⁰

Other systems which, although imperfect, had some affinity with that of Zoroaster and were more or less contemporary with him, were those of the Indians and the western Iberians. Of the latter (who occupied Georgia in antiquity) no legislator is named. The legislator of the Indians was Dionysos. He was not the only incarnation of the soul of Dionysos, since another was born much later. In the same way

¹¹⁸ Id. 246-8.¹¹⁹ Id. 250-2.¹²⁰ Id. 252-4.

there were two incarnations of Herakles. This shows that identical lives are apt to occur at intervals, and nothing entirely new ever happens which has not happened before.¹²¹

All men believe in some deity, but since their beliefs differ, that belief which has always existed and never changed must be the best. That is why we adhere to the doctrine of Zoroaster, following Pythagoras and Plato. It is superior to others in accuracy and is also part of our national tradition. Other doctrines vary in merit in so far as they depart from it. Certain sophists, who have a large following, promise greater happiness through a genuine immortality untouched by any element of mortality, in place of our doctrine of a continued and repeated reincarnation of souls. One must not be misled by such extravagant promises. In any case, these sophists do not speak of eternity in an absolute sense, but only in one direction—the future; for they assume that the universe had a beginning in time.¹²²

They also deceive men with two other fallacies. First, they hold that human affairs cannot change by themselves, but only with the whole universe. Secondly, they hold that the reign of evil will be short and will be followed by eternal happiness. These are specious doctrines. Ours is preferable, because it gives the soul an absolute eternity, both past and future. It may be argued that a future eternity is preferable to a past eternity, simply because the latter is past and the future has more real existence. No one desires the past in the same way as he desires the future. So it could be argued that eternity in both directions exceeds the future eternity only by something non-existent, and is therefore really neither larger nor better. 'But we. . . .'¹²³

At that point the text breaks off. No surviving manuscript proceeds beyond those last tantalizing words. In one manuscript a final note reads: 'The rest is to seek, though never to be found; for they say it was destroyed by Scholarios.'¹²⁴

¹²¹ Alexandre, 254-6. The doctrine is derived from Plotinus, *Enneads*, v. 7. 1.

¹²² Alexandre, 256-8.

¹²³ Id. 260.

¹²⁴ Id. 261 n. 11.

XVIII

ECLIPSE AND RETURN

WITH the completion of the *Book of Laws* Plethon's life's work was finished. Perhaps it was almost literally his life's work, as George Trapezuntius said: 'in quibus scribendis totam aetatem consumpserat'.¹ Perhaps, too, he never gave up revising the work, as Masai inferred with his theory of two recensions.² But at any rate he had no time to write anything more. At a great age, well over ninety, he died on 26 June 1452. Constantinople survived him by less than a year. But that was not quite the end of Greek independence, nor even of the story of Plethon.

The Emperor Constantine died on the battlements on 29 May 1453, but Gennadios survived; so also, for a few years, did the Despotate of the Morea. Gennadios was taken prisoner and sold as a slave, but rescued on the orders of Sultan Mehmet, who had decided to make him Patriarch. Reluctantly, the 'humble monk Gennadios' accepted the mandate in order to give such protection as he could to the Greek nation. He was enthroned in January 1454. Within a year he became disillusioned and tried to resign, but he was persuaded to remain in office throughout 1455. Then he retired again to a monastery. Twice he was persuaded to come out of retirement again, and at least once he resumed the office of Patriarch, but the dates are uncertain.³

At a date which is also uncertain, probably about 1455, he was reminded of Plethon by a communication from Mistra. Demetrios still reigned there on sufferance, until Mehmet decided to seize the city in 1460. While Demetrios was still there, his wife Theodora wrote to tell Gennadios that she had in her possession Plethon's manuscript of the *Book of Laws*. Some of Plethon's friends knew that she had it, and pressed her and Demetrios to let them see it; but they thought Gennadios should see it first. Her letter does not survive, but its contents are made clear by another letter written some years later by Gennadios to the Exarch Joseph; and they are also implied in his reply to Theodora, in which he thanked her for arranging 'to have sent to me the book of

¹ Legrand (1962), iii. 289.

² Masai (1956), 402-4.

³ Zisis, 199-208, argues that Scholarios did not resume the patriarchate. M. Jugie, in Scholarios viii, Appendix, 31*, argues that he resumed the patriarchate twice.

Gemistos or Plethon, about which I have frequently written'.⁴ The rest of his letter to Theodora describes in vivid terms his horrified reaction to what he found in the *Book of Laws*.

It had taken him four hours to read. Then he had thrown it aside; but on reflection he decided to consult with the Princess Theodora about its contents and what should be done with them. 'Of all the legislators of polytheism and swinish life who lived before the divine dispensation, and of all those who have dared since the divine dispensation to concern themselves with legislation contrary to the true law', he told her, Plethon was 'the most ignorant sophist of all'.⁵ He was puerile and perverse; he had misused his undeniable capacity for expression; he had turned his skill in philosophy to serve his 'wicked prejudices'; and so forth.

Plethon, he explained, had always been a victim of 'Hellenic doctrines' or paganism.⁶ He had studied ancient literature not, like the Christians, merely for the sake of the language, but in order to associate himself with the ideas of the poets and philosophers. He was probably led into error by daemons, as Julian the Apostate had been. Then Gennadios told the story of his study under the Jew Elissaeus.⁷ Among those whose influence he acknowledged were Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus; but he was silent about Proclus, to whom he owed most of his ideas, such as polytheism, the nature of the universe, and the human soul. Those who had studied Proclus would have no difficulty in recognizing the source of Plethon's heresies.⁸

It was mere childishness on Plethon's part to think that he could convince anybody with these rehashed notions, put together as they were in a confused way which would be more fitting for a manual labourer than a philosopher. Where he was repeating ideas from Plato, Aristotle, or the Christian tradition, it would be better to go back to the original sources than to trust Plethon. His own innovations were merely ridiculous.⁹

For example, one-third of his book was taken up with hymns, prayers, and rules on sacrifice to his imaginary gods, which it would be intolerable for a Christian to repeat, even with contempt and ridicule, 'except to the extent of recognizing from their titles the absurdity of the author and the repellent character of his book'.¹⁰ His worst

⁴ Scholarios, iv. 151. 30-152. 1. For the letter to the Exarch Joseph, see p. 25 above and pp. 359-61 below.

⁵ Scholarios, iv. 152. 6-12.

⁷ Ibid. 152-3 (see pp. 23-8 above).

⁹ Ibid. 154. 10-21.

⁶ Ibid. 152. 28.

⁸ Ibid. 153. 22-34.

¹⁰ Ibid. 154. 22-6.

blasphemies were the expressions he used to slander Christian teachers as sophists and charlatans, and Christian theology as consisting of lies and sophistries.¹¹

The book, Gennadios concluded, did not deserve any response. He wept for the soul of the author, but there was nothing to be done with the book except to commit it to the flames. He was therefore sending it back to the Princess so that she could earn the reward of her piety by destroying it. To comfort her, he added that true friends of Plethon would also be grateful, since its destruction would help to spare his reputation.¹²

Theodora was reluctant to take the responsibility for destruction. In the meantime Mistra fell to the Turks, and she and Demetrios fled to Constantinople, bringing the manuscript with them. Gennadios' letter to the Exarch Joseph described the double sorrow which they brought him: first, their expulsion from the Peloponnese, and secondly the fatal book.¹³ This time Theodora insisted that it was for Gennadios 'to execute judgement upon the works of apostates'.¹⁴ Finally he acquiesced. The letter explains, in much greater detail than the earlier letter to Theodora, why the act of destruction was inevitable. It comprises also an account of Gennadios' earlier relations with Plethon; and, more valuable still, the list of chapters in the *Book of Laws* together with some indications of their contents. The letter is headed 'On the book of Gemistos' in the manuscripts, to which Gennadios added in his own hand the words: 'and against Hellenic polytheism'.¹⁵

Gennadios first told the Exarch the story of his earlier suspicions of Plethon and their controversy over the respective merits of Plato and Aristotle. He emphasized the purity of his own motives. He admitted that his letter congratulating Plethon for his attack on the *Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine* had been intended as a veiled threat. He had had no quarrel with Plethon 'except on behalf of the faith'.¹⁶ He described his exchanges with Theodora, and then proceeded to analyse the contents of the book.

His analysis began with the list of chapter-headings, which he had preserved in order to show both how ill organized and how blasphemous the book was. He described his initial reactions in even stronger terms than he had used to Theodora. Sometimes he had laughed at the foolishness of the arguments, at others his eyes were filled with tears

¹¹ Ibid. 154. 26-30.

¹⁴ Ibid. 171. 10-11.

¹² Ibid. 155.

¹⁵ Ibid. 155. 19-20.

¹³ Ibid. 157. 32-5.

¹⁶ Ibid. 156. 26.

over Plethon's perversity. 'Then, with a deep sigh, I addressed him as if he were present; for I seemed to see Gemistos before me, or rather Plethon, as he calls himself.'¹⁷ The rest of the letter, up to the final paragraph, apostrophizes Plethon in the second person. It is simpler, however, to use the third person in summarizing his argument in translation.

What is true in Plethon's work, Gennadios went on, has long been well known. His new theories were derived from Zoroaster by way of his former tutor, Elissaeus. The other philosophers whom he quoted were known to him only at second hand. But he had omitted the most important one: 'those who have read Proclus, and also condemned him, know as well as I do that he is the source of your arguments'.¹⁸ The poets were another source of Plethon's polytheism. He had not seriously examined Christianity, which he had abandoned before reaching intellectual maturity. It was ridiculous to divide up the divine nature into separate units, for which he had given no reasons. Passages in the Bible which appeared to speak of gods in the plural should be treated as merely metaphorical. Plethon's claim that there was a common doctrine of mankind in favour of polytheism was baseless. As on earth, so in heaven, monarchy was the best form of government. Listening to Plethon's arguments was like 'listening to someone recounting legends and dreams'. It was impossible to imagine a restoration of polytheism, 'which perished so many years ago'.¹⁹

Gennadios' peroration is full of lamentations for Plethon's errors and protestations of affection and honour. 'But your book must be destroyed, lest it be the cause of lamentation for others and perpetual infamy for its author.'²⁰ There followed another reference to his exchanges with Theodora. After rereading the book in the hope that some of it might be preserved (for example, some chapters on physics, logic, and suchlike matters), he concluded that the attacks on Christianity were so embedded in it at every point that the whole must be destroyed. 'So we caused the book to be committed to the flames.'²¹

But he preserved the list of contents and the hymns 'so that no one could ever have grounds to denounce our judgement'. As copies had probably been made of the text, he had issued a general order that anyone who held a copy must destroy it, on pain of excommunication. 'But for that poor fellow himself, we have poured out floods of tears, and many times cursed the day that the book came into our hands.'²²

¹⁷ Scholarios, iv. 160. 25 ff.

¹⁸ Ibid. 162. 25-6.

¹⁹ Ibid. 169. 35, 170. 28-9.

²⁰ Ibid. 171. 5-8.

²¹ Ibid. 171. 36.

²² Ibid. 172.

Gennadios was evidently Patriarch when he issued the order of destruction on pain of excommunication, but his letter to the Exarch Joseph was written from a monastery near Serrai, presumably during his retirement. It was not the last attack he made on Plethon's reputation. At another unspecified date, he wrote a theological treatise entitled: *On our Triune God and Creator of all things, and against Atheists or Determinists and Polytheists*. In this work he did not name Plethon, but his target is easily identified:

If there happened recently to be a man who wished to revive Hellenic polytheism, this was due to his intellectual obtuseness. But still more obtuse would be any adherents of his who might prefer an abominable error to the true and common doctrine of mankind. And we wrote a great deal against his folly, not because we cared about him or his nonsensical attacks on the sacred truth, but because of the present-day ignorance of most of our people, who used to be so very wise only a short time ago, lest any of the simpler sort should be at risk of being convinced by the false reputation of this man's wisdom.²³

He went on to praise Plethon's scholarship—still without naming him—but to castigate his inability to tell truth from falsehood, 'so that even a child could refute him and he could not have replied to a child who told lies to test him'. That was why the so-called 'ideal system of laws' had to be destroyed by fire. 'We were compelled to do it by our love and fear of the Son of God, who for our sake took on our nature, and of his ideal system of laws; and to satisfy these we could not have done otherwise'. God himself, said Gennadios, has refuted the polytheists, 'and now perhaps only a few believe in polytheism, in corners and in darkness . . . for now, as I have said, the whole world believes in God and that he is One'.²⁴

One aspect of the *Book of Laws*, which must strike a modern reader, provoked no comment from Gennadios. Try as he might, Plethon could not entirely repudiate Christianity. The 'unbroken succession of godlike men' (i. 5) suggests the apostolic succession; parts of his ritual and liturgy (iii. 34-6) are Christian in origin; and he has even retained the doctrine of the Trinity in an altered form (iii. 34). He derived his triadic structure of the universe from Plato, just as his predecessors had done. Some liberal theologians of his own day, such as Bessarion, even credited Plato with a valid anticipation of the doctrine of the Trinity. But Plethon went further, even into the minutiae of vocabulary.

²³ Ibid. 180. 13-21.

²⁴ Ibid. 180. 26-181. 10.

When he wrote his *Commentary* on the Chaldaean Oracles he claimed both a Platonic and a Zoroastrian ancestry for his trinity of gods. In the *Laws*, his trinity consists of Zeus, Poseidon, and Hera. It has been plausibly pointed out that Poseidon corresponds, for him, with Jesus, and Hera with the Virgin Mary rather than with the Holy Spirit.²⁵ The correspondence with Orthodoxy is therefore not exact, but close.

It becomes even closer when Plethon says that the second and third members of his trinity are 'emitted' from the first, one of them directly and the other through the second. The verb *προβάλλειν* (emit) has a common root with the noun *προβολή*, which was the Gnostic term for 'emanation' as well as an alternative term for the 'Procession' of the Holy Spirit. So Plethon sought to give his Neoplatonic concepts a familiar Orthodox guise.

Gennadios certainly cannot have failed to notice this. In his eyes it would have aggravated Plethon's blasphemy, because it amounted to a parody of Orthodox belief. Such a reaction would have been characteristic of theologians in both the eastern and the western Churches: their bitterest hostility was always directed at heretics who started from a Christian position and sought to adapt or corrupt it, rather than at outright infidels. Other prominent ecclesiastics under the Turkish occupation followed Gennadios with similar diatribes.

One was his pupil Matthew Kamariotes, the Grand Rhetor of the Church, who had once written warmly of Plethon's essay *On Virtues*, but who now wrote two savage *Addresses against Plethon*. He concentrated his attack mainly on the heresy of determinism. Plethon, he wrote, was 'raised to an undeserved eminence in philosophy if anyone ever was'. He described Plethon as 'this most abandoned of atheists', 'that apostate', 'outrageously irreligious', 'an enemy of the truth', 'an unparalleled example of wickedness', and so on.²⁶

Kamariotes had some knowledge of the *Book of Laws*, presumably from Gennadios, whose pupil he had been. He accused Plethon of reviving 'that ancient error of the Hellenes' about Zeus and polytheism. He frequently quoted the chapter 'On Fate' (ii. 6). He knew that other fragments of the *Laws* 'were preserved by those who adhered to that man and still admire him'.²⁷ But he knew their contents only by hearsay.

²⁵ Tatakis, 303 (Poseidon); A. Toynbee, *The Greeks and their Heritages* (Oxford 1981), 311 (Hera).

²⁶ Kamariotes, 3, 5, 31, 37, 169, 219.

²⁷ Id. 4, 31, 89, 115, 195.

In the next generation another attack on Plethon came from Manuel of Corinth (Peloponnesius), Grand Rhetor in the early sixteenth century. He called Plethon an atheist, a pagan, and a madman, and also attacked Bessarion.²⁸ It was understandable that in the Orthodox world, living under Ottoman domination, the doctrines of Plethon should become anathema, since the Church was the sole remaining guardian of Greek nationalism. The obverse to this reaction was the interest shown by Muslim philosophers in his work, which began with the translation into Arabic of the extant portion of the *Book of Laws* about half a century after his death.²⁹

It was also true, as both Gennadios and Kamariotes said, that Plethon still had his adherents and admirers in Greece. There were, for example, the two panegyrists at his funeral, the monk Gregorios and Hieronimos Charitonimos. The latter escaped to the West, as did two other devotees, Kabakes and Apostoles, both of whom did their best to salvage remnants of the *Book of Laws*. Many others of Plethon's less intimate circle also escaped to the West: Argyropoulos, Tribolis, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, Sphrantzes, and others. At home the tradition of teaching at Mistra was continued by John Moschos, but without any trace of Plethon's esoteric philosophy.

Plethon's sons, Demetrios and Andronikos, are not known to have played any part in preserving his memory. Presumably one or both escaped to the West. There was a grandson of Plethon living in Italy in 1467, helped by a pension from Bessarion.³⁰ Little more is known of his descendants, apart from the probable identification of John Gemistus at Ancona in the early sixteenth century.³¹ The survival, or resurrection, of his name as a philosopher rested in other hands.

Two anonymous scribes, one Greek and one Latin, show the strength of feeling in favour of Plethon and against Gennadios, at least among a minority. The Greek was the same man, already quoted earlier, who praised Plethon with the words: 'Your fame is immutable and need fear no envy.' He also attacked the 'jealous and uneducated man who destroyed your work', describing him as 'detested by the best of the Greeks'.³² The writer seems to have had some familiarity with the contents of the *Book of Laws*, for he went on with an imaginary account of Plethon's reply to Gennadios.

Plethon would say that his enemy, 'being unable to answer or to

²⁸ PG 160, 791-2; N. Iorga, *Histoire de la vie byzantine*, iii (Bucarest 1934), 271.

²⁹ Anastos, 271.

³⁰ Masai (1956), 309 n. 3.

³¹ Geanakoplos, 191 (see p. 30 above).

³² Alexandre, 408-9 (see p. 13 above).

refute the work where he found it unacceptable, especially on the subject of the Hellenic religion and theology, like those who opposed the theories of Porphyry, Julian, and others, destroyed the book by fire, dissolving in jealousy and pouring out the poison which he always nourished against me'. But the writer added that men could still find useful lessons 'from a few fragments of the work'. At no point in his tirade did he name Gennadios.³³

The other protest came from a later hand in Latin, written on a sixteenth-century manuscript of a part of the *Laws*: 'this is what has come down to us from that divine volume of politics known as the *Laws* (*De Legibus*) of Gemistus; the rest was destroyed in the flames by the sacreligious Scholarios. He gave way to his old hatred and hostility to the extent that he did not even spare what was of common utility, indulging his savagery against the books when he could not do so against the author.'³⁴

It was in Italy, and chiefly through the personality of Bessarion, that the memory of Plethon was kept alive in the next generation, but not in connection with the *Book of Laws*. There is no evidence that Bessarion ever read the *Laws*, which he could hardly have defended as a priest and a cardinal. But there were hints in his letter of consolation to Plethon's sons that he knew of their father's belief in metempsychosis, since he wrote that if this doctrine were to be accepted, he would not hesitate to say that the soul of Plato had chosen to dwell in the body of Plethon.³⁵ He did not hesitate to compare his old teacher directly with Plato or Plotinus. Variations of this praise became fashionable among intellectuals in Italy. It is only necessary to recall Ficino's description of him as 'like a second Plato'³⁶ or Platina's as 'the second after Plato'.³⁷

So it was as the protagonist of Platonism in the strict sense that he was remembered, and attacked or defended, in the western Renaissance. Platonism was not yet clearly distinguished from Neoplatonism in the West, and Plethon to some extent contributed to the confusion by his writings. There was, however, a difference in this respect between his principal works. The *Book of Laws* was so impregnated with Neoplatonism that Plato himself would hardly have recognized his own philosophy in it: whether or not he would have approved it is another matter. But the *Laws* and Plethon's other Neoplatonic works

³³ Alexandre, 410-11.

³⁵ Alexandre, 404-5; Anastos, 186-7 n. 8.

³⁷ Mohler, iii. 406. 35.

³⁴ PG 160. 789-90.

³⁶ Ficino, ii. 1537.

were little known in the west. In *De Differentiis* and the *Reply* to Scholarios, on the other hand, Plethon did present an almost pure exposition of Platonism, with relatively little Neoplatonic contamination.

It was therefore more or less rightly understood in the West that Plethon was to be judged by his contribution to the revival of Platonism in the strict sense. The importance of the contrast which he had drawn between Plato and Aristotle was also recognized, though its significance was still imperfectly understood. The question at issue was that which Plethon and Gennadios (or, to use their original names, Gemistos and Scholarios) had debated in their respective polemics. The debate was renewed in Italy between new champions of the two philosophers. It began in the middle 1450s and continued for nearly twenty years.³⁸ At first the participants were exclusively Greek expatriates, but towards the end a new generation of Italian humanists joined in.

The champion of the Aristotelians against the Platonists was George Trapezuntius, who was bitterly hostile to Plethon personally. His animosity was made clear in a work written before the dispute developed, under the title *Adversus Theodorum Gazam in perversionem problematum Aristotelis*. It can be dated on internal evidence to the year 1454 or thereabouts, since it stated that Plethon 'iam enim biennio mortuus est'.³⁹ Trapezuntius' main purpose was to convict Plethon of heresy. He referred to certain 'prayers to the Sun as if it were a god and the soul of the world, which were composed with great eloquence by a certain Gemistos, the most impious of all mankind, who is even said to have left a work aimed against Christ our Lord'.⁴⁰ This indirect reference to the *Book of Laws* was followed by a more explicit denunciation.

There lived in the Peloponnese a certain man who was utterly impious and irreligious, by name Gemistos. During his lifetime he perverted many from faith in Christ to the foulest beliefs of the pagans; and on his death, which took place about two years ago, he left some books whose theme was *De Republica*, which laid down to his own satisfaction the foundations of his whole profanity. For he thought to bring it about through his writings and his eloquence that one day all men would adhere to his follies. Thus he preached, while still

³⁸ A. Gaspary, 'Zur Chronologie des Streites der Griechen über Plato und Aristoteles im 15 Jahrhundert', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 3 (1890), 50-3, and J. W. Taylor, *Georgius Gemistus Pletho's Criticism of Plato and Aristotle* (Menasha, Wis., 1921), 9-18, list the principal contributions, but with unsatisfactory chronology. The best account is in Mohler, i. 346-98; see also J. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* (Leiden 1976), 201-29.

³⁹ Mohler, iii. 340. 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 302. 38-303. 1.

living, that within a few years after his death all nations would revert to the true theology of Plato. Whether it was from devilish inspiration or from the ungodliness of powerful friends that he convinced himself of this, I do not know. But much would certainly be discovered if the books came to light. It is said that they were burned or hidden by either Demetrios, prince of the Peloponnese, or his wife.⁴¹

Later George Trapezuntius was to use even more offensive language about Plethon. When he was seeking to ingratiate himself with Sultan Mehmet II at Constantinople, he wrote of Plethon that he was doubtful 'whether to call him a man or a beast'.⁴² On other occasions he used language just as bitter but less suitable for the ears of the Sultan. In a prayer which he addressed to a contemporary martyr, Andrew of Chios, he wrote: 'just as you have overthrown the ungodliness of the Turks in Greece, so also by your intercession do you repress the Platonists who are rising up in Italy'.⁴³ In his *Comparationes philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, written probably in 1455 (because it states that Plethon was dead 'iam fere triennio'), he expressly linked Plethon with that other evil genius, Muhammad.

This work, usually known for short as the *Comparatio*, was ostensibly written to state the case for Aristotle against Plato, but it also violently attacked Plethon. Two chapters in the last section of Trapezuntius' polemic were devoted to proving that Plato ought to be compared with Muhammad rather than with Aristotle.⁴⁴ A strong point of criticism against both Plato and Muhammad was their encouragement of pleasure. It was normal for Orthodox Greeks to accuse Muhammad, among other crimes, of being a 'voluptuary'. To link Plato with the same accusation was unusual. But Trapezuntius had evidently been driven to extremes of hostility against Plato by the rising tide of favour towards him in Italy. For this he blamed Plethon.

'A second Muhammad (*Machumetus*) has been born and brought up in our time', he wrote in his penultimate chapter, 'who, unless we take care, will be as much more destructive than the first as Muhammad was himself more destructive than Plato.' He identified the villain as Gemistos who changed his name to Plethon, 'so that we should more readily believe him to have come down from heaven, and thus the sooner adopt his doctrine and law'. Plethon had, he conceded, 'the

⁴¹ Mohler, iii. 340. 15-27.

⁴² Angelo Mercati, 'Le due lettere di Giorgio da Trebisonda a Maometto II', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 9 (1943), 97.

⁴³ Masai (1956), 285 n. 1.

⁴⁴ Trapezuntius, book iii (pages unnumbered).

most exquisite and elegant style', and an eloquent tongue. He was a devotee of Plato to such a degree that he considered nothing to be true except what Plato believed 'about gods, the soul, sacrifices to the gods or daemons, and all the rest, great and small'. In writing a set of 'new principles of life', he was even 'believed to have spewed out much against catholic piety'. The word 'believed' implies that Trapezuntius had not himself read the *Book of Laws*.⁴⁵

There followed the story, already recorded, of Plethon's prediction that a revival of paganism would soon replace both Christianity and Islam. He added that a similar report of Plethon's heretical claim had been brought by Greeks who fled from the Peloponnese after his death about three years before. 'So clearly he wished to indicate that the lightning and terrible thunder of the religion and faith of which he himself was either the author or the prophet, despised and abhorred as it was, would miraculously spread to all peoples.'

After his wretched, vile, and miserable death ('for he was born a Christian and reborn by water and the Holy Spirit, but relapsed into paganism from insanity'), his book on these matters was 'said to have been removed and hidden by Demetrios, prince of the Peloponnese'. Trapezuntius seems now to have been less certain of the book's fate, for he himself urged that 'it should be sought out and committed to the flames by those who have charge of such matters—I know what I am talking about'.

He went on to a long series of solemn warnings against allowing another false prophet to arise in Europe, in succession to Plato, Muhammad, and Plethon. Once he called Plethon 'a second Plato', but only in a pejorative sense; elsewhere he placed Plethon third in the succession, Muhammad being the second. He acknowledged that Plethon was 'not inferior to Plato in eloquence nor beneath him in learning', but that only made his crimes the worse. He added that Plethon 'writes so beautifully and elegantly, and reports the fictions of Plato so briefly and clearly, and defends the doctrines of paganism and I believe attacks our doctrines in these books, that no one but the most learned could complain against him'.

Next came a long passage of invective against Muhammad, including an account of the early triumphs of Islam over the Emperor Heraclius in the seventh century. Plethon was to be regarded as even more dangerous than Muhammad, because he surpassed him 'in everything pertaining to learning, eloquence, and deceit'. Trapezuntius then

⁴⁵ Legrand (1962), iii. 287-9, reproducing part of the above.

spoke of Plethon's secret hymns to the Sun, which he himself had seen: he used the word 'vidi!' three times, so horrible was the sight. The same ideas, he assumed, would be found in those books to which he had devoted his life and all his energies. Thus Plethon had continued to the end, 'for he completed almost a hundred years in this miserable life'.

After reverting once more to the blasphemous prophecy that a revival of paganism would soon replace both Christianity and Islam, Trapezuntius concluded with an appeal to the ecclesiastical leadership (*pontifices ecclesiarumque praesules*) to stamp out Plethon's heresies. he attributed them 'either to the suggestion of daemons or because he hoped that some would be seduced by his books, on account of the corrupt morals of Christian princes'. In a final sentence he claimed to have done all that he could personally 'to ensure that a fourth Plato does not surpass the third by as great a margin as the second surpassed the first or the third surpassed the second in the advocacy of voluptuousness'.

The chapter as a whole is in effect a separate diatribe against Plethon embedded in a much longer work on the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, as the title implies. The *Comparatio* is naturally biased heavily in favour of Aristotle. As such it would have commended itself to the scholastic philosophers of the West, to whom Plato was still less acceptable in spite of the efforts of Plethon during his stay at Florence. Partly for this reason, and partly because of the attack on Plethon, Bessarion felt moved to reply to the *Comparatio*. Bessarion was not an extreme Platonist, as Trapezuntius was an extreme Aristotelian. But he could not pass over in silence such judgements as Trapezuntius advanced in the second book of the *Comparatio*, that Aristotle had practically anticipated the Christian revelation and that Plato was the source of all heresies.

Within a few years (certainly before 1459), Bessarion completed his treatise *In Calumniatorem Platonis*.⁴⁶ It was a very lengthy work, written originally in Greek but later translated into Latin by Bessarion himself with the help probably of Theodore Gazis. Bessarion did not name Trapezuntius as the 'calumniator', but the identification was not in doubt. Nor did he name Plethon, except in one passage where he called him 'a man born in our own time who accepted the theories of Plato'.⁴⁷ He also corrected one of the calumniator's misinterpretations

⁴⁶ *In Calumniatorem Platonis* occupies the whole of Mohler, ii.

⁴⁷ Mohler, ii. 272. 23-4.

of Plethon's criticism of Aristotle, while making it clear at the same time that he did not agree with Plethon's criticism. This was typical of Bessarion's scrupulous approach to scholarly controversy, in marked contrast with Trapezuntius. His treatise in reply to the calumniator was in fact the first systematic exposition of Platonism that became available to western scholars in the Renaissance.

When Bessarion sent a copy of the Latin version of *In Calumniatorem Platonis* to his French friend Guillaume Fichet in 1472 (the last year of his own life), he wrote that 'we have concentrated the whole argument on the truth rather than on obtaining acceptance of new doctrines'.⁴⁸ This was characteristic of his style, and made him more important as an expositor of Plato than was Plethon, his own teacher, though the latter was the pioneer. Bessarion was always moderate in his criticisms, in sharp contrast with the other participants in the controversy between Aristotelians and Platonists, some of whom took sides in violent terms. He was able to exercise a restraining influence on Theodore Gazis (a moderate Aristotelian and a loyal friend) and several others, but not on George Trapezuntius (an extreme Aristotelian and a personal enemy) nor on Michael Apostoles (an extreme Platonist and a partisan of Plethon).

Concurrently with the major exchanges between Trapezuntius and Bessarion, and starting a little earlier, other arguments took place on particular topics which had been left unresolved from the controversy between Plethon and Scholarios (Gennadios). The chronology of these secondary arguments is difficult to disentangle. So far all attempts to do so have proved incomplete or unsatisfactory; in some cases it is hard even to establish the order of the contributions.⁴⁹ But enough has been established to show that at least one of the secondary arguments began before Trapezuntius' *Comparatio*, and the series as a whole continued at least until Bessarion's death in 1472.

There were three main topics in the secondary arguments, all drawn ultimately from Plethon's *De Differentiis*. One was Plethon's determinism, which stands apart from the rest because only one contribution survives. This was Theodore Gazis' *De Fato*, which criticized Plethon for not appreciating the distinction between logical and causal necessity, and for not recognizing the effects of accident and free will.⁵⁰ He attributed Plethon's errors to ignorance or failing

⁴⁸ Legrand (1892), 237.

⁴⁹ See n. 38 above.

⁵⁰ Mohler, iii. 239-46; J. W. Taylor, *Theodore Gaza's De Fato* (Toronto 1925), 11-18.

intellectual powers, or both. This attack elicited, so far as is known, no reply from any quarter.

The other two topics in the secondary arguments seem to have been initiated close to the same date. In each case, so far as the surviving texts indicate, the subject was broached by a brief essay from Bessarion. One topic was Plethon's criticism of Aristotle's doctrine that Nature does not act with 'deliberation'. The other was the question whether Plato (and therefore Plethon) or Aristotle (and therefore Scholarios) was right about the nature of being. Whenever they began, these two debates proceeded simultaneously.⁵¹

The question whether Nature (and therefore Art, which imitates Nature) acts with 'deliberation' or not seems to have been reopened by Bessarion's essay *Quod Natura consulto agat*.⁵² He argued that Nature does deliberate, but only under the general direction of the supreme Mind. This essay was once thought to have been written by Gazis, because Trapezuntius, who received a copy by hand of a Greek monk called Esaias (Isaiah), chose to address his reply *Adversus Theodorum Gazam in perversionem problematum Aristotelis*,⁵³ although in fact it was directed against Bessarion. He perhaps did so because he knew that Gazis was close to Bessarion, and feared to attack the eminent Cardinal directly. Bessarion replied to Trapezuntius with a more substantial work entitled *De Natura et Arte adversus Georgium Trapezuntium*.⁵⁴ In this he took sides more openly with Plethon, who was described in the Latin version as 'opinionum Platonis aemulus atque defensor'.⁵⁵

Since Trapezuntius' *Adversus Theodorum Gazam* stated that Plethon died 'two years ago', it can be presumed to be earlier than his *Comparatio*, which stated that he died 'almost three years ago'.⁵⁶ This particular debate (*de natura et arte*) therefore began slightly earlier than that on Plethon's conception of being (*de substantia*), in which Bessarion's opening essay can be placed with certainty between Trapezuntius' *Comparatio* (probably 1455) and Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem* (before 1459).⁵⁷ It can reasonably be assumed that both topics had been under discussion already among the expatriate Greeks, before their views were committed to paper.

Bessarion's opening essay on Plethon's theory of being, which

⁵¹ Mohler, i. 393.

⁵² Id. iii. 89-90. For the attribution to Gazis, see J. W. Taylor, *Georgius Gemistus Pletho's Criticism of Plato and Aristotle* (Menasha, Wis., 1921), 12, and Mohler, iii. 88.

⁵³ Mohler, iii. 277-342 (see also p. 365 above).

⁵⁴ Ibid. 92-147.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 93. 10-11.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 340. 18; Alexandre, p. xl n. 2.

⁵⁷ Mohler, iii. 91.

involved the Platonic Theory of Forms, was entitled *Adversus Plethonem de substantia*.⁵⁸ But despite the title, Bessarion was not so much criticizing his old teacher as explaining Aristotle's view that universals were simply abstractions made from particulars, as against Plato's view (which Plethon had adopted and extended) that universals had an independent existence of their own. This essay led to a more strongly expressed criticism of Plethon by Theodore Gazis, called *Adversus Plethonem pro Aristotele de substantia*.⁵⁹

Gazis' essay attracted much more controversy than Bessarion's. Michael Apostoles wrote a violent attack on Gazis, in defence of Plethon. Other expatriate Greeks joined the controversy. Andronikos Kallistos wrote a reply to Gazis. Nicholas Secundinus wrote a letter to Kallistos, congratulating him on his reply, and this is fortunately dated 5 June 1462. Bessarion, who had received a copy of the reply from Kallistos, had also approved it already, and sent a rebuke to Apostoles, dated 19 May 1462, with a copy to Kallistos. In passing, Bessarion said that, much as he admired Plethon, he did not approve the 'ill temper and strange obstinacy' with which he attacked Aristotle. To Apostoles, Bessarion used severer language. Apostoles accepted the rebuke, but the controversy was not ended.⁶⁰

It was reopened by a letter from John Argyropoulos to Bessarion, suggesting that he had not dealt firmly enough with Trapezuntius' *Comparatio* in his *In Calumniatorem*.⁶¹ Argyropoulos' letter is not extant, but it can be inferred from the correspondence which followed that he offered an additional defence of Plato, particularly of the Theory of Forms. Bessarion wrote back that he was too busy to reply in detail, but had asked Gazis to do so on his behalf. Gazis' reply, which was entitled simply *Refutatio* (*Ἀντιρρητικόν*),⁶² took an Aristotelian viewpoint.

This led to a fresh outburst from Apostoles, who wrote an essay passionately attacking Aristotle and Gazis, and defending Plato and Plethon (whose names, he needlessly pointed out, were almost the same).⁶³ He was ready, in fact, to attack anyone who was not a Platonist.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 149-50.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 153-8.

⁶⁰ The texts mentioned in this paragraph will be found in the following: Mohler, iii. 161-9 (Apostoles); ibid. 170-203 (Kallistos); PG 161, 691-6 n. (1) (Secundinus); Mohler, iii. 511-13 (Bessarion); Legrand (1962), ii. 251 (Apostoles).

⁶¹ Mohler, iii. 204-6; Taylor, op. cit. (1921), 16.

⁶² Mohler, iii. 207-35.

⁶³ J. E. Powell, 'Michael Apostolios gegen Theodoros Gaza', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 38 (1938), 71-86. For the homonymy of Plato and Plethon, see 83. 11.

He did not draw the line even at those who had a personal link with Plethon, such as Demetrios Chalkokondyles, an Aristotelian who taught Greek in Italy.⁶⁴ Demetrios was a cousin of Plethon's former pupil, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, but that did not spare him Apostoles' abuse. So far as is known, neither Gazis nor Chalkokondyles deigned to reply.

It would not have been surprising if the Italian humanists had become exasperated by the Greek expatriates. But in fact the Italians were just beginning to join in the controversy themselves. Thanks to the creation of the Platonic Academy at Florence, and a similar Academy under Bessarion's patronage at Rome, a number of Italians were now qualified to debate the issues. Most of them favoured Platonism. Ficino and Filelfo at Florence supported Bessarion. Giovanni Andrea de' Bussi (known as Giannandria), the Bishop of Aleria, praised both Plethon and Bessarion. For this he was criticized by George Trapezuntius' son, Andreas.⁶⁵ Another Italian, Niccolò Perotti, criticized the elder Trapezuntius' *Comparatio* in an essay aggressively entitled *Refutatio deliramentorum Georgii Trapezuntii*.⁶⁶

Andreas Trapezuntius appealed to the scholastics in Paris for a verdict in favour of his father. But Bessarion submitted Perotti's essay in rebuttal of the extreme Aristotelian case. This was the first time that an Italian had been recognized as fully master of the complexities. But it also underlined the fact that there was no one at the University of Paris competent to follow the arguments in Greek. As a result a proposal to establish (or re-establish) the teaching of Greek at Paris was the subject of a correspondence between Bessarion and Guillaume Fichet in the years 1470-2.⁶⁷ But in the latter year Bessarion died, leaving the controversy unresolved.

As the controversy faded away, so Plethon's name faded with it. In the early stages references to him by name were fairly common; and by implication they were even more so, since all the points in dispute arose from his works. With the passage of time, the issues took on a vitality of their own, irrespective of their origin. The later contributions to the debate scarcely mentioned Plethon, apart from the outbursts of Apostoles. When Bessarion sent a copy of the Latin translation of his *In Calumniatorem Platonis* to Marsilio Ficino in 1469, he made no reference to Plethon in his covering letter.⁶⁸ In his letter of

⁶⁴ D. J. Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 92.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *op. cit.* (1921), 16-17.

⁶⁶ Mohler, iii. 345-75.

⁶⁷ Legrand (1892), 223-50.

⁶⁸ Mohler, iii. 543-4.

thanks, Ficino referred to great names of the past—Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus—but he too did not mention Plethon.⁶⁹

Meanwhile two events occurred which helped to ensure, if only in the long run, that Plethon's name was not finally forgotten. Each of them was due to an initiative by an Italian admirer: Cosimo de' Medici, who had been so much impressed by Plethon's lectures in Florence during the Council of Union; and Sigismondo Malatesta, who had once tried to persuade Plethon to join his court at Rimini.

It was probably about 1460 that Cosimo de' Medici founded the Platonic Academy in his villa at Careggi, and installed Marsilio Ficino in another villa nearby as director of studies. It was an intellectual dining-club, which met occasionally to honour Plato and discuss philosophy, rather than an academic institution in the modern sense. Ficino's time was mainly spent in translating the dialogues of Plato and the works of the Neoplatonists into Latin. His tribute, in the introduction to his translation of Plotinus, to Plethon's influence over Cosimo de' Medici has already been quoted.⁷⁰

Plethon's direct influence on Ficino was perhaps not as great as that of some other contemporaries, such as Nicholas Cusanus and Bessarion. But it was not negligible. It has been said that Ficino clearly inherited from Plethon the doctrine of 'an ancient tradition of pagan theology that led directly from Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, and Pythagoras to Plato and his followers' (although Plethon never mentioned Hermes).⁷¹ There are also other indications. Ficino must have used Plethon's text of the Chaldaean Oracles for his Latin translation, since he had the same number of evidently identical lines in the same order, although other versions were in existence.⁷² He drew on the Oracles in his *Platonic Theology*. Probably he also made use of Plethon's *Commentary*, since he followed Plethon in attributing the Neoplatonic doctrine of the 'vehicle of the soul' to 'the Magi following Zoroaster',⁷³ an attribution which Plethon had been the first to make. Ficino had certainly, too, read *De Differentiis*, from which he quoted Plethon's correction of a misinterpretation of Aristotle by Averroes.⁷⁴

The most striking indication of all is Ficino's reference to Heracleitus' famous doctrine that all things are in a state of permanent flux. He

⁶⁹ Ibid. 544-5.

⁷⁰ Ficino, ii. 1537 (see p. 156 above).

⁷¹ P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York 1943), 15.

⁷² Kieszkowski, 159-60.

⁷³ Opsopoeus, 36-9; Ficino, i. 404.

⁷⁴ Ficino, i. 327.

commented that Plato had touched on this doctrine when he said that 'the world is indeed ever becoming, but never is'.⁷⁵ He added that Plotinus and Proclus said the same, and that 'Plethon too does not deny that this might be proved to be the case, and we in fact prove that it could be so in our *Theology*'.⁷⁶ Thus in a single sentence Ficino placed Plethon on a level with the great minds of the past, expressed his own agreement with Plethon, and implied that he had himself read extensively in Plethon's works (since he could not otherwise have known that Plethon 'does not deny' the theory in question).

In the long run, however, it was not through philosophy that the influence of Plato on Ficino made its greatest impact on western Europe. It was through the arts and literature. Ficino's translation of Plato's *Symposium* in particular, and still more his introduction to it, were seminal events in the cultural history of Europe. From this work, for example, came the theory of Platonic love,⁷⁷ and much else that influenced poets and painters in all the countries of western Europe. It would be wrong to attribute any share in this outcome to Plethon, who had no interest in such aspects of Platonism and only wanted to establish Plato's superiority to Aristotle in metaphysics. But by the interest in Plato which he stimulated in Cosimo de' Medici, and consequently in Ficino and his colleagues and successors, Plethon earned at least the right to be remembered in western Europe.

The second initiative which helped to keep his memory alive was due to Sigismondo Malatesta, the hereditary ruler of Rimini. In his capacity as a mercenary commander (*condottiere*), Malatesta led a Venetian expeditionary force in 1464 against the Turks in the Peloponnese. He attacked Mistra, which the Turks had held only since 1460. Although he could not capture the citadel, he entered and held for a time the lower town. There he found Plethon's grave. When he withdrew, not wishing to leave his favourite philosopher in enemy territory, he dug up Plethon's remains and carried them back to Rimini. There he reburied them in a sarcophagus set in the outer wall of his Tempio Malatestiano.

The inscription on his tomb reads, in translation from the Latin:

The remains of Gemistos the Byzantine, Prince of philosophers in his time, brought here and placed within by Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, son of

⁷⁵ *Theaetetus*, 152 E.

⁷⁶ Ficino, ii. 1594.

⁷⁷ Id. i. 716. See also Kristeller, *op. cit.*, 286.

Pandolfo, commander in the Peloponnesian war against the King of the Turks, on account of the great love of learned men which burned in him, 1465.⁷⁸

Seven other bodies were buried in similar niches round the outside of the temple,⁷⁹ but none was the equal in fame of Plethon.

The revival of Platonism which Plethon pioneered was slow to mature. Even after 1460 Bessarion could still write that Plato was practically unknown in Italy.⁸⁰ Scholasticism, which meant Aristotelianism, still dominated the western universities for more than a century. During that time Plethon's name was nearly forgotten. Even among the Greek diaspora there were few who preserved his memory. One of the rare exceptions was Janus Lascaris, who was too young ever to have heard Plethon himself, but recorded notes of his essay *On Fortune*.⁸¹

Two other expatriate Greeks in the next generation to whom Plethon's name at least must have been familiar were Michael Tarchaniota Marullus and Manuel Kabakes.⁸² They were close friends and both inclined to pagan doctrines. Manuel was the son of Plethon's most devoted admirer, Demetrios Raoul Kabakes. Marullus, who was born in Achaia in 1453 and carried to safety with his family when the province was overrun by the Turks, was a soldier and poet. He settled in Florence and married a secretary of Lorenzo de' Medici. Neither of the two friends ever mentioned Plethon, but their outlook on life had much in common with his.

Another descendant of the diaspora who spoke enthusiastically of Plethon was Theodore Spandugnino, who claimed that he belonged to the imperial family of Cantacuzene. He wrote a history of the rise of the Ottoman Empire in which he told the story of Malatesta's exhumation of Plethon's remains, and described the latter as 'in the opinion of educated Greeks, the most learned man and the most skilled in Greek letters who has lived since the time of Aristotle'.⁸³ But in fact few Greeks expressed such an opinion, and even fewer Italians echoed it in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Ficino himself was the great exception. The rest are briefly listed:

⁷⁸ Masai (1956), 365. The name 'of Gemistos' is rendered in Latin as IEMISTII.

⁷⁹ Ch. Yriarte, *Un Condottiere au XV^e siècle: Rimini* (Paris 1882), 253.

⁸⁰ Mohler, ii. 8. 21-2, 538. 5-7.

⁸¹ Masai (1956), 193-4.

⁸² Kanellopoulos, ii. 42.

⁸³ K. N. Sathas, *Μνημεία ἑλληνικῆς ἱστορίας*, ix (Paris 1890), 160.

Pico della Mirandola, a close friend of Ficino, who referred to Plethon as *approbatissimo Platonico*;⁸⁴ Bartolomeo Platina and Niccolò Capranica, who both gave him credit in their funeral orations on Bessarion;⁸⁵ Giannandria, Bishop of Aleria, who praised both Plethon and Bessarion in the introduction to his edition of Apuleius;⁸⁶ Petrus Crinitus, in his *De honesta disciplina*; Giovanni Francesco della Mirandola, nephew of Pico, in his *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis christianae disciplinae*; Paul Manutius, a son of Aldus, who linked Plethon with Bessarion and Theodore Gazis as 'godly men'; Maffeo di Volterra, in his *Commentariorum urbanorum libri XXXVIII*, describing Plethon as 'maxime Platonicus'.⁸⁷ These superficial references exhaust the list in the early years after Plethon's death.

A later generation of philosophers acknowledged its debt at least to Plato, if not yet to Plethon. Some of the more revolutionary thinkers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries took their starting-points from Plato rather than Aristotle: among them Copernicus, Luther, Galileo, Kepler, Giordano Bruno. Copernicus even possessed a copy of Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, so he may at least have noticed the name of Plethon.

Plethon's own works gradually emerged from obscurity, both in translation and in print. *De Fato* was translated within twenty years of his death. The first work to be printed in Greek was *On the Events among the Greeks after the Battle of Mantinea* (Venice 1503), later followed by the *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles* (Paris 1538) and *De Differentiis* (Venice 1540, Paris 1541). But in May 1502 Aldus Manutius had written in the preface to his first edition of Thucydides regretting that he could not include Plethon for want of manuscripts.⁸⁸ Evidently he was then unaware of Bessarion's collection in his own city.

The earliest Latin translation to be published was Marthanus' version of the *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles* (Paris 1539). But as early as 1502 Marcus Antonius Antimachus had translated *On the Events among the Greeks*, encouraged by his father (who had studied under Grigorio Tifernate, who had heard Plethon's lectures at Florence), though it was not printed until 1540. Other translations of this work into other languages followed: a French version in 1556, a Spanish version in 1604. Its popularity in translation confirms that

⁸⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Commento sopra una canzone de amore da H. Benivieni*, ed. E. Garin, 510.

⁸⁵ Alexandre, p. xi (Platina); Mohler, iii. 406 (Capranica).

⁸⁶ Taylor, op. cit. 16.

⁸⁷ References given in Knös, 147-71.

⁸⁸ L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford 1974), 132.

western scholars were not yet sufficiently familiar with Greek to be able to study Greek historians in the original. But English and German scholars have had no translation available, other than into Latin.

Several attempts were made in the sixteenth century to provide a Latinized version of *De Differentiis*. Donatus' Latin dialogue (1540) must be excluded, since it was not even a paraphrase; Scutellius' translation (1541) was unpublished; Chariander's (1574) was very imperfect. The work was indeed difficult to translate. Another less difficult philosophical essay, *De Virtutibus*, was also published in translation (1552). But even as familiarity with Plethon's works grew, mistaken notions about him persisted.

No mistake could be stranger than that of his translator, Antimachus, who counted Plethon as a poet as well as a philosopher.⁸⁹ But this was a matter of judgement rather than of fact. A different mistake was made by Paolo Giovio in his *Elogia clarorum virorum* (1546). He wrote biographical notes on many of the expatriate Greeks of the fifteenth century—Manuel Chrysoloras, Theodore Gazis, George Trapezuntius, Bessarion, Argyropoulos, Janus Lascaris, Demetrios Chalkokondyles—but mentioned Plethon only in passing, wrongly including him in Bessarion's circle at Rome.⁹⁰

Half a century later Boissard's *Icones quinquaginta virorum illustrium* included portraits of several of the same Greeks whom Giovio had named, though none of Plethon. In 1593 Francesco Patrizzi (a not inconsiderable philosopher in his own right) published a new and fuller edition of the Chaldaean Oracles, in which he criticized Plethon's *Commentary*.⁹¹ Plethon's reputation and even his name thus remained still in the shadows.

The same neglect continued in the seventeenth century, at least until the Chiote scholar, Leon Allatios (1586-1669), began his devoted labours.⁹² A French traveller visiting Athens in the seventeenth century recorded the reproaches of a learned monk at the neglect in the West of the fifteenth-century Greek scholars who had come among them, naming 'the wise Argyropoulos, Theodore of Gaza,

⁸⁹ Lilius Gregorius Gyraldus, *De poetis nostrorum temporum*, ed. K. Wotke (Berlin 1894), 48-9.

⁹⁰ Paolo Giovio, *Elogia veris clarorum virorum imaginibus apposita* (Venice 1546), fo. 16^v; *Pauli Iovii Opera*, viii, ed. R. Meregazzi (Rome 1972), 58.

⁹¹ Masai (1956), 375 n. 1.

⁹² L. Allatius, *De Georgiis et eorum scriptis diatriba* (Paris 1651); the section on Plethon reprinted in PG 160, 773-94.

George of Trebizond, and George Gemistos'.⁹³ In the eighteenth century a beginning was made (by Gibbon among others) to remedy this neglect, but even in the early nineteenth century grossly inaccurate statements were made about Plethon by serious scholars—for example, that Marsilio Ficino had been his pupil.⁹⁴

Most of Plethon's early editors were at pains to vindicate his name against the charge of paganism. Adolphus Occo, in the introduction to his translation of *De Virtutibus* in 1552, described Plethon as a man 'to be numbered among the Christians, as is proved by this work'.⁹⁵ George Chariander, in the introduction to his translation of *De Differentiis* in 1574, defended Plethon indirectly by arguing that 'the Platonic school of philosophy should be followed first and foremost by a Christian' and that Plato's was 'a Christian philosophy'.⁹⁶ Later scholars, such as Hardt and Gass in the nineteenth century,⁹⁷ Tomadakis and Wind in the twentieth,⁹⁸ have held a similar view of Plethon's fundamental faith in Christianity. Others, such as Allatios in the seventeenth century, Boivin in the eighteenth, and Alexandre in the nineteenth, have been more sceptical.⁹⁹ Since the recovery of the *Book of Laws*, scepticism seems justified. One modern historian who had no doubt on the subject—Arnold Toynbee—ventured the remarkable opinion that Plethon's forecast of a revival of paganism at the expense of Christianity might actually one day be fulfilled.¹⁰⁰ It is at any rate difficult to believe that anyone would spend many years writing such a book unless he believed that he was genuinely establishing a new theology, even if he felt obliged by the conventions of the age to pretend that he was merely restating ancient truths.

Such a judgement has only become possible as a result of critical studies of his life and works in the last century and a half. The first step was the publication by Alexandre of the fragments of the *Book of Laws* (*Traité des Lois*) with a French translation by A. Pellissier in 1858. Migne included most but not all of Plethon's other surviving works in volume 160 of the *Patrologia Graeca* in 1866. Many other scholars—

⁹³ C. Th. Demaras, *A History of Modern Greek Literature* (London 1974), 67.

⁹⁴ See, for example, C. Stanford, *Plato's Apology, Crito and Phaedo* (London 1834), introduction, p. v: 'Marsilius Ficinus, a Florentine, born A.D. 1433, and educated by Pletho, under the patronage of Cosmo di Medici . . .'.
⁹⁷ Alexandre, pp. ii-iii.

⁹⁵ A. Occo, preface to *Quatuor virtutum iusta explicatio* (Basle 1552).

⁹⁶ PG 160, 887-8.

⁹⁸ Tomadakis, 155; E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London 1967), 244-5.

⁹⁹ J. Boivin, 'Querelle des philosophes du quinzième siècle', *Mémoires de littérature . . . de l'Académie . . . des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 2 (1716), 715-29; Alexandre, pp. ii-iii, li-liiii.

¹⁰⁰ A. Toynbee, *The Greeks and their Heritages* (Oxford 1981), 312-14.

Greek, German, French, Belgian, Italian, Polish, Russian, Scandinavian, American, British—have listed his manuscripts, edited individual works, or contributed to his biography. The most notable contributions in the present century have been made by Anastos, Masai, and Lagarde.

Yet Plethon remains difficult to place in the cultural history of Europe. He has been called the last of the Byzantines and first of the Neo-Hellenes.¹⁰¹ Almost exactly the same phrase has been applied to Scholarios.¹⁰² It can hardly be true of both, and it seems scarcely appropriate to either of them. A more accurate description of Plethon might be the last of the ancient Hellenes and first of the modern Greeks. He remains, however, strangely unknown in the western world, which he helped indirectly to shape, by teaching the humanists not to be content with reading and translating Plato's poetic and perennially fascinating dialogues as exercises in literature, but also to study and understand Platonism.

¹⁰¹ Zakythinos, ii. 350.

¹⁰² K. N. Sathas, *Μνημεία ἑλληνικῆς ἱστορίας*, iv (Paris 1883), p. vii.

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NOTES

1. The following are omitted:
 - (i) Persons of the Trinity and names of Olympian and Zoroastrian deities;
 - (ii) Names of continents, countries, races, and nationalities.
2. It is impracticable to segregate references to Gemistos and Plethon under the page numbers of Parts I and II respectively. For convenience, the following division is adopted:
 - (i) Under Gemistos, the events of his *Life and times* and his *Character and scholarship*
 - (ii) Under Plethon, the list of his *Writings* and the analysis of his *Philosophical doctrines*.
3. Figures in bold type indicate full translations or summaries.

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